

BALLOONS FOR BOWLEGS *by* **WILLIAM DU BOIS**

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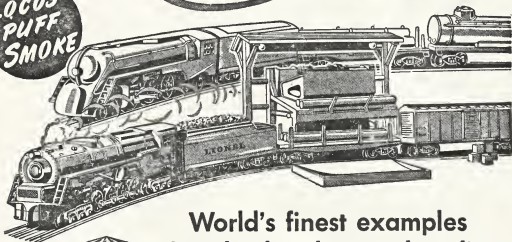
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THE JANUARY ISSUE WILL



Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)



Vol. 116, No. 2

for
December, 1946

Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Balloons for Bowlegs.....WILLIAM DU BOIS 12

Brevet-Captain Carter was scared blue. But he and his nonesuch sergeant, Grady, intended to show the Washington bigwigs the value of aerial reconnaissance in the Seminole campaign—if they broke their necks doing it. High time War Department brass cleared the cobwebs from its brains—and took its feet off the ground!

The Crooked Mile.....JOHN H. KNOX 62

Jim Silvers—Inspector U. S. Border Patrol, Department of Justice—had been proud to wear his badge, but he wasn't going to wear it any more. It cramped his style. When a man has to walk a crooked mile to do a job, he can't be saddled with official rules and regulations and there's only one way to follow the winding trail—get out from behind the shield.

SHORT STORIES

Uncle Ned's Teeth.....JAMES NORMAN HALL 40

When Captain Joe of the *Mama Tu*—the most accomplished liar in French Oceania—sailed into the lagoon with the first bottle of Scotch seen in those parts since 1940, of course there had to be a story to go with it. And there was—the tale of the strangest Lend-Lease transaction of World War II.

Killers Love Guns.....MICHAEL OBLINGER 47

Some slug-crazy hombre had walked into the Pin Point Saloon, sprayed the premises with lead then sauntered out—leaving four assorted dead men sprawled in the sawdust. The killer left a hot trail and Sheriff Gordon followed it right to the shack of Si Crocker, the bounty hunter—but he didn't learn much there. Had a nice visit with Si though. And the kids. They sure were cute—even though a mite trigger-happy.

Spite Corner.....GEORGES SURDEZ 52

It was absurd to quarrel for generations over a tiny wedge of land hardly big enough to hold three apple trees. And yet the Vandrels and the Coulongs had nursed the feud for years. What a foolish family row! *Parbleu!* The solution was so simple. . .

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BE OUT ON DECEMBER 11TH

- The Devil to Pay**.....FRANKLIN GREGORY 54
When I dropped \$400 to Slugger McGonigle at a poker session at the Blue Pencil Club, I was on a spot so hot I'd have sold my soul to the Devil to get clear. The Slugger was awfully nice about the cash. Just worried about my health, he said—and so was I.
- The Cape Town Blighter**.....GEOFFREY MAJOR 88
Saint X and Teddy MacLagan were at the Cape recuperating from a bit of a brush with Umeer Khan when they ran into that angel, Isa Galloway—and her constant companion, the Foul-Swine. Unthinkable that the bouncer should be permitted to continue his attentions to the lass—so naturally some sort of stratagem was in order. Point of honor, don't y'know—though a few quid profit on the side wouldn't be amiss.
- Charley Hoe Handle and the Great Big Bass**.....JIM KJELGAARD 100
When Horse Jenkins bet Charley he couldn't catch that prize big-mouth, Charley took him up. Of course that old swampcat Injun hooked the fish and his old enemy, too. One thing you got to say for Horse, though—he took it fine. A game warden in more ways than one.
- North of Forty**.....FRED LANE 104
"The sea, Mr. Fanshaw," said Captain Colby, "might possibly be compared to a woman—except that where women are concerned, a sailor is *always* north of forty. It pays to proceed cautiously."
- Winter Drift**.....HAROLD O. WEIGHT 110
Fifty-nine years is a long time but I remember it all clear as a picture—the time the Yuma Kid came to the Lazy Seven. Maybe it's because he was the first killer I'd ever seen close up. But I'll never forget what he did that night when the mercury stuck at 30 below.
- Downriver Passage**.....STEVE HAIL 122
Everything depended on the outcome of that race between the side-wheelers *Solano* and *Chin Du Wan*, including the State mail-and-express franchise and the future of the *Chin's* skipper, Jedediah Sudden. But the *Solano* was the fastest packet on the Sacramento and the *Chin* didn't have a chance unless Jed could dig up a bone fide miracle.

FACT AND LEGEND

- One-in-a-Million**.....K. M. WALKER 95
As told to John Scott Douglas
It's a very exclusive aggregation—the marine surveyors' club—and your chances of joining are exactly one in a million. Here's why—
- Right on the Barrelhead**.....JOHN RICHARD YOUNG 117
General Putnam regarded the code *duello* as just so much toy-soldier nonsense. Just once did he accept a challenge—and prove his point right on the barrelhead.
- Why Bother Davy Jones?**.....ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN 118
You've all heard of Davy Jones' Locker—now hark to the legend of Fiddlers' Green, the sailorman's Paradise where grog is free and girls come to frolic with the A.B.'s while master and mates swab down.

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*Cover Painted for Adventure by Rafael DeSoto
Kenneth S. White, Editor*

THE CAMP-FIRE

*Where Readers, Writers
and Adventurers Meet*



AROUND half dozen names you've never encountered on our contents page before this issue—all lined up for proper *Camp-Fire* induction on joining the Writers' Brigade. And as many "old hands" clamoring to get a word in edgewise before time for the blaze to be banked till the next session. Best thing to do, we guess, is just take 'em in order, and let the chips and sparks fly where they may. First—

JAMES NORMAN HALL, who, with his famous collaborator, Charles Nordhoff, has delighted the world with such popular works as the *Bounty Trilogy*, ("Mutiny on the *Bounty*," "Men Against the Sea" and "Pitcairn's Island") and "The Hurricane" makes his permanent home in Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands as most of you know. He is in this country now but, as his wife wired us in response to our request for a word to *Camp-Fire*, happened to be on his way by car from San Francisco to New York when we hollered. Not having one of those new-fangled office-to-auto telephones installed we'll just have to wait till his next story appears here to properly introduce a man whose name should have been on our contents page years ago.

MICHAEL OBLINGER, whose rural mélange, "Killers Love Guns," appears on page 47, introduces himself succinctly thus:—

I was born and raised in the West and lived in Montana, Washington, Minnesota, and also spent ten years in the Canadian Northwest, in Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest territories. I prospected and pioneered all through that country. When the war came, I went overseas with the Canadian *Malamutes* as a scout and dog-driver, and drove dogs in Russia. I've always been sort of a wanderer; finally wandered East about three years ago.

The character in the story—the old man with the gun—is a composite of a lot of people I have met here and there over the

years, but I got the idea from an old fellow I met in Montana. He had an old shack in the hills near St. Ignatius, and used to go barefoot all year round, and had an amazing collection of guns. The funny thing about him, though, was that though he loved guns and had a lot of them, he was really afraid of them.

JOHN H. KNOX, whose novelette of the Border Patrol appears on page 62, adds the following bit of reminiscence and notation to "The Crooked Mile" on stoking our blaze for the first time—

One time at Ruidoso, away up in the tall pines of Billy-the-Kid's country, Sr. Inspector Wm. R. Holt, a veteran of some hot gunfights in the El Paso sandhills, was telling me of a little argument with some smugglers on Cordova "Island" which ended with four dead horses, one dead *contrabandista*, and three more in a Juarez hospital. Afterwards, over his coffee cup, the tall and rugged patrol inspector got confidential on a literary matter. Border Patrol stories, said he (in substance) stank.

That did not hurt my feelings any, because I had never written one and had read few, despite my long-standing interest in both this colorful service and the ramparts its watches. But I asked him to be specific, and learned that one thing which had made the inspector print-allergic and otherwise saddened about us scribes, was a story he had read about a Border Patrol officer who "clubbed" his gun (that is, swung it by the barrel) in a fight.

I did not blame him and I still don't—Inspector Holt, I mean. I thought something ought to be done. So, with the brashness of one who had managed to get quite a passel of whodunits into print, I up and said I'd write him one. And I finally did get around to writing it—ten years later. Maybe he's forgotten, but anyhow, it's here in this issue, and whatever its faults, there's not a clubbed gun per hundred split infinitives in the whole yarn. And I've seen more of the Border and the Patrol too since then.

The Border Patrol is a comparatively
(Continued on page 8)



How to help your child fight **FEAR OF DARKNESS**

... as recommended in the interest of child welfare by Rose G. Anderson, Ph. D.,
Director of the Psychological Service Center of New York



1 Fear of the dark is founded on a dread of the unknown. Many a grown man feels his courage ebb with the daylight. And to a child, whose limited experience makes him even more fearful, the dark can be filled with terrors... unfounded fears.



2 Bring back the daylight world he knows, with your "Eveready" flashlight... show that the yard, or the basement, is the same familiar place by night as by day... that night-time sounds are made by simple things. Let him use your flashlight himself—



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THE CAMP-FIRE

(Continued from page 6)

young organization, but it is already something of a legend, a fact due more to its intrinsic glamor than to the scant publicity it's had. It was established in 1924 to enforce the first immigration quota laws which had been passed a few years before. It was an important job then, and it is even more so now. The Mexican Border alone is 2300 miles long, and west of El Paso and the Rio Grande it is protected from alien infiltration only by a barbed wire fence, plus the will, intelligence and courage of a handful of tough, determined, and well-trained men. The men furnish the character and Uncle Sam furnishes the training, and a Border Patrolman, with a job as adventurous as the R. C. M. P.'s or the Rangers', must also know his criminal law like a state officer, and be an authority on immigration and naturalization laws as well. Not to mention court procedure, rules of evidence, firearms, and the language of the adjacent country.

He gets good equipment, having horses, radio cars, and airplanes for his use. But the job is no snap, even so, and the alien problem is bigger today than ever, particularly here on the southern border, across which so many agricultural workers have passed in recent years. I have it from that pair of rugged trouble-shooters, Inspectors Jesse Holmes and Raymond Black, of San Antonio, that right now their district leads all others in arrests. Forty-five arrests in one raid is not unusual here. "Once your average peisano jumps the border," Black complains, "he heads either for San Antonio or Chicago. He considers San Antonio the biggest city in the world, and Chicago its most important suburb."

(Chicago readers take note.)

As to myself, I was born in Carlsbad, N. M. at a time when the natives still thought the Cavern was just a bat cave. I left early, lived in Alabama and South Carolina, and came back (west) to Texas as soon as I had reached a six-year-old's age of discretion. I rode in my first round-up then, on a ranch my father owned, and at about the same time, got my first taste of border excitement when I watched (from a safe spot on the El Paso side of the Rio Grande) the rifle and cannon fire of Villa and Orozco, blasting their way through the mud rabbit-warrens of Juarez in the flood-tide of the Madero revolution. After the battle I got a beautiful red bugle cord and a much-dented canteen.

I was "educated-at" by various Texas schools and colleges, and during that time and since have followed a variety of occupations. Since it seems to be *de rigueur* for a writer to boast that he has earned an honest living, I will mention that I have been a machinist's helper, architect's office-boy, assistant-cameraman, one-job actor (playing a drowned corpse off Catalina), I worked with an insulating gang along the coast and on the Mojave, worked in

lumber camps and mills in California, Oregon and Washington, and as a messboy on a Swedish ship out of Gotenburg. I've done some reporting, ad promotion, sold shoes in a Ladies' Ready-to-Wear, started a milk business in a oil boomtown, operated a photostat for an abstract company, and a single-jack copper mine in the border country near Columbus where Villa made his famous blunder. I studied art for two years in a portrait painter's studio, am a journeyman shipfitter, and (I hope my neighbors don't see this) a farmer. Anyhow I've got a farm. Also a wife, three youngsters, and a typewriter which I find time to pound now and then.

GEOFFREY MAJOR, who lets us sit in on a yarn-spinning session at Bulawayo's Stengah Club on page 88, hews the following chips for his first fueling of this department—

I was born in brawling Pittsburgh, within sound of a railroad whistle, which must have seeped insidiously into my half-English, half-Scotch blood; for even yet I can't resist a train. The first object I ever grabbed for was a volume of Kipling, runs the old family legend, which may be apocryphal but which pleases me no end.

Grew up all over Pennsylvania. Was immensely influenced in early youth by a very tall very much moustached gentleman who told me fascinating and pretty incredible tales of Anglo-Indian life, pinched out of three-volume novels most likely. Pledged myself to the service of Queen Victoria and was thunderstruck to discover much later that she was, alas!, two decades in her grave.

Met Dick Halliburton, who infected me with the other-side-of-the-hill complex; but I fretted dutifully through four years of almost-intolerable restriction at a small Eastern college, with the whistle of the engine still in my ears. Turned finally and rabidly Anglophile, with Indian tendencies. Senior year: heard a South African folk song which instantly divided my loyalty; went out into the hills with a load of African books and remained, eating biscuits and fish, until I'd absorbed them all. Ever since have wavered between India and South Africa, hence the Stengah Club.

Roamed. . . All manner of jobs: assistant bone-scraper in charge of pteranodons in palaeontological laboratory of large museum; laborer in enormous, soulless meat-packing plant, where I 'waded in blood to the knee' alongside some colourful and cosmopolitan gentlemen; layout man and copy-writer in advertising agency; farm-hand in the heart of the Black Hills; and one glorious week in a beer-refrigeration salesroom in the back room of which there was always a keg on tap . . . lovely, dear dead days!

(Continued on page 10)

TERRY TRAPPED THE ALIEN SMUGGLERS AND THEN...

HURRYING TO REACH HER UNCLE'S CAMP ON LAKE HURON BEFORE DARK, BETTY ADAMS STUMBLES UPON MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN WATKINS COVE



HERE'S YOUR CUT, CORBETT... THREE HUNDRED BUCKS. GUIDE 'EM TO TONY'S SHACK AND YOU'RE THROUGH

OKAY, LOUIE. ANOTHER LOAD TOMORROW NIGHT?

HANDS UP!

YOU CAN SEE WHY I HAD TO COVER YOUR MOUTH... ONE PEEP WOULD HAVE SPOILED OUR SHOW

GRACIOUS! AND THE SIGNALER IS YOUR MAN!

SENATOR CONGDON'S CAMP, MISS? WHY YOU'RE THREE MILES OUT OF YOUR WAY

COME BACK TO BORDER PATROL HEADQUARTERS AND I'LL DRIVE YOU OVER



DO YOU MIND IF I USE YOUR PHONE? UNCLE HARRY MAY BE WORRIED

GO RIGHT AHEAD. MEANWHILE, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL CLEAN UP



THIS BLADE'S A HONEY... THREE DAYS' WHISKERS GONE LIKE MAGIC!

THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING, TERRY



WHY, UNCLE, DO YOU KNOW MR. CORBETT?

KNOW HIM? WHY MAJOR CORBETT WAS MY BEST INTELLIGENCE OFFICER!

I'D BEEN PLANNING TO VISIT YOU AFTER I CRACKED THIS CASE, COLONEL... I MEAN SENATOR



YOU GET SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES IN JIG-TIME WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD, AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR ACCURATELY, YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES, USE THIN GILLETTES



(Continued from page 8)

Free-lance writing, did some more wandering with the whistles. Discovered the truth in Talbot Mundy's saying that friendship is the only thing worth finding; and agreed with Buchan that South Africa is the only white man's country left. Learned Afrikaans, which is now rather rusty.

War—to Canada to enlist and a kick in the face labeled 'unfit for military duties.' Same in the States when I returned. Wrote Pennsylvania bond rallies. A six-or-seven-day job in a war plant, and precious little writing till V-J Day. Since then, have finished the first draft of a novel of Rhodesia; and out of nostalgia and heart-ache created the Stengah Club, whose members (I am one) are forever torn between the old India and the present Africa, between Kipling's empire-builders and the Boer takhaars. Otherwise have been marking time till travel is a possibility again.

What do I hope to do, besides travel? Bag a tiger . . . consume a great deal more of Scotch and soda . . . visit the Highlands of Scotland where my ancestors stalked the stag . . . write a novel about Hudgee and one about Major Hodson of Hodson's Horse, and a third about the Boer War . . . hear all the Afrikaans folk-songs there are . . . and collect a lot more pipes and books. . . .

And I want to die on the veldt, preferably at the age of ninety and by the paw of a lion. A large one with a jet-black mane, as picturesque as possible.

There isn't much to say about the story, except that (as Teddie MacLagan mentions) there is plenty of documented evidence for the appearances of the ghostly Dutch brigantine off the Cape, and King George V himself wrote in his diary that she had been sighted by personnel of his squadron. Again, as MacLagan says, the King wrote: 'At 10:45 a.m. the ordinary seaman who had this morning reported the Flying Dutchman fell from the foretopmast cross-trees and was smashed to atoms.'

Anyone care to argue?

JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS, who collaborated with Kenneth M. Walker in the article about the "One in a Million" Club, introduces his marine-surveyor friend thus—

Kenneth M. Walker's life has been so packed with drama that a whole issue of *Adventure* would be needed to do it justice, but I'll do the best I can in the brief space of a letter.

Walker was a neighbor of mine when I lived in San Diego—a big, hearty man with a deep, chuckling laugh, and an ability to select the significant that makes the natural teller of tales. He looks as if he belonged in the engine room or on the bridge and the salty flavor he gives his experiences intensifies this impression.

Walker's father was a seafaring man who

became a marine surveyor in Seattle. His sea yarns led the younger Walker to leave home at twelve as cabin-boy on a trading schooner bound for the Bering Sea. School seemed woefully tame after that, so he ran away again, this time fetching up at Durban, South Africa. His father killed a second fatted calf and lectured the prodigal about what might happen if he missed his schooling, but the lecture hadn't time to take effect before Walker met the Australian skipper with whom he'd made the Arctic Cruise.

The trading schooner was departing for the South Seas, and Walker, as might be guessed, sailed with her. Though just fifteen, he had so won the skipper's confidence that he was set up in a trading post on one of the Tuamotus while the schooner traded with other natives on islands to the southward.

After his homecoming, Walker was apprenticed to learn the marine-boiler trade, and he was about to earn his living at it in early 1917 when he learned that a sailing schooner was leaving for England with a shipment of wheat. The schooner fell afoul of a German raider in the Strait of Magellan; Walker and the rest of the crew were taken prisoner, while their ship with its contraband cargo was sunk.

Released at Newport News, he signed on a California-bound ship, but after a series of adventures, the luckless ship had her lifeboats washed overboard and her aerial damaged by a gale and then ran out of coal within sight of Twin Peaks, near San Francisco. A fire broke out in one hold, and the burning, helpless ship was blown partway across the Pacific before a Jap ship heard her short-range radio and relayed an SOS which brought help.

Walker took a job as a marine boiler-maker in San Francisco until his father decided he'd settled down and made him a partner. Marine surveying gave Walker all the adventure any man could ask for. Part of his work was diving and salvaging ships and this kept him moving between Puget Sound and Alaska. Then he transferred to Chicago and for seventeen years carried on the same work in the Great Lakes and along the Mississippi and its tributaries. But the Pacific Coast was home, and Walker eventually established a new headquarters in San Diego.

Much of his work there is concerned with the tuna fleet which is for the most part based in San Diego. But during the war he had added work involving merchantmen clearing from or returning to that port.

Despite the hazards so often found in his work, Walker's sense of humor never deserts him. Will Rogers once said that "a joke seems to lose part of its humor when it happens to yourself." That isn't true of Walker, for he sees the humorous side even in experiences that boomerang.

(Continued on page 131)



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A Captain Carter Story

By WILLIAM DU BOIS

BALLOONS FOR



The big-wigs under the canvas shelter burst into the open for a better view.



ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK KRAMER

FROM where he sat, high on the shoulder of a dune, the collapsed bag of Mr. Lamb's balloon resembled a giant blue caterpillar snoozing in the sun. The men who swarmed about the ascension-ground (testing the spool of the guide-rope, uncolling the fat segment of hose that led from the hot-air furnace) seemed no more real than ants at this distance. Even Sergeant Grady, stripped

BOWLEGS



to the waist and bellowing orders in the broiling Florida afternoon, was dwarfed by comparison with that monstrous blue slug from Brobdingnag.

Brevet-Captain John Carter stirred uneasily in his tight-fitting uniform coat, and cursed the Florida sun impartially. At this moment, he would have given a great deal to be down on the flat beach with Grady, driving the squad

to its final preparations for what might well be a moment in military history. The year was 1838—and the sullen Indian war that had dragged on for years in the heart of this heat-drugged peninsula seemed destined to drag on forever. Surely the United States Army's experiment with a captive balloon (as an instrument in that war) would be worth a footnote, when the histories were written.

Carter wondered, too, if his name would go down in the history-books as the officer who risked the first ascension on St. Augustine Beach this afternoon. He did not wonder if he would be afraid: that went without saying. To be blunt about it, he'd be scared as blue as the lazy blue sack on the flats below. Never mind that now, he told himself. You've faced death before, in sun and shadow—and covered the fact you were afraid. Covered it well enough to convince yourself that you had a knack for Indian-fighting, for killing at close quarters and ducking a split-second before you were killed in return. If you're destined to break your neck in that nightmare contraption, so be it. You'll still find the strength to walk down to sea-level, and climb into the wicker basket—as though you hadn't a doubt in the world that you'd live forever.

He surveyed the proving-ground one more time. The visitor from Washington, as befitted his station, still lounged in his folding chair, under the canvas shelter the Army had so thoughtfully provided. Beside him sat Carter's own commanding general, the mayor of St. Augustine, and Mr. Hector Lamb himself, the owner of the balloon—an alert wisp of a man, beaming among the big-wigs, as though he had no doubt of the triumphant outcome of the experiment now in the making. But Carter knew that it was a tense group, for all its apparent unconcern. He knew that they were watching him covertly (for all their concentration on the stir of preparation about the balloon itself), and wondering why he had volunteered as the sole guinea-pig.

Carter wondered a bit himself as he sat waiting in the sun—an isolated hero who didn't feel in the least heroic.

First of all, there'd been the general's eagerness. The general was not given to sudden enthusiasms, but his belief that the balloon might be useful in war (even an Indian war) was both pugnacious and definite. The willingness of one of the general's own staff officers to risk an ascent in the car was a point in the balloon's favor, an attitude that could hardly fail to move the visitor from Washington.

Carter stole a look at that august personage. Mr. Samuel Eccles, he reflected, was anything but impressive, though he came direct from the office of the Secretary of War. But Mr. Eccles had a full-blooded sneer when he chose to employ it. He had sneered frequently as Mr. Lamb extolled the virtues of an observation balloon as an extra eye in war. Mr. Eccles, in fact, had branded Mr. Lamb and all his works as so much new-fangled nonsense. The inventor had brought his equipment to Florida at his own expense; he had set up this experimental station on St. Augustine beach out of friendship for the commanding general of

the territory. Mr. Lamb, in short, desired his old friend to have the honor of being the first to add his balloon to Army equipment.

Mr. Eccles, just as definitely, insisted that the War Department should have been consulted in advance. His thin-lipped conversation had rubbed Carter the wrong way from the start. He knew that it had been the real reason why he had volunteered for the ascent.

Now, he came sharply back to the business at hand as Sergeant Grady stumped up the side of the dune and saluted him with parade-ground punctilio.

"That sack will lift fast when it starts to fill, sir. Will you come down now and inspect the car?"



CARTER rose and flexed his limbs, affecting a nonchalance he did not feel. The ponderous air-hose (heavy as a boa-constrictor and almost as hard to manage) had finally been connected with the balloon itself: already, the sleepy blue caterpillar had begun to take on a monstrous semblance of life, as the first blasts of hot air invaded its gummed-silk interior. He took in the scene one last time: the solid brick furnace, secure on its coquina base; the rippling muscles of the black Hercules who manned the bellows; the anxious frown on Corporal Simpson's face as he supervised the two husky regulars who stood with fists clamped to the spool of the guide-rope. The rest of the company stood at solemn parade-ground rest, making a kind of open square at the limits of the proving-ground. Their light blue dress coats and shakos made a brave pattern against the blinding white of the dunes. In the past, Carter had damned that uniform as a perfect target, when he was campaigning in the palmetto scrub; today, he was obscurely glad that his men made so brave a display for the eyes of the bored visitor from Washington.

If Mr. Samuel Eccles took back a favorable report tonight, the War Department might well authorize the instant purchase of this equipment, as it stood. A thousand dollars, as Mr. Eccles had already remarked, was a high price to ask for a pair of balloons—even if one could consider them more useful than a bizarre toy. Within the next hour, he hoped that Mr. Eccles would change his mind.

Carter put a hand on Grady's shoulder as they went down to sea-level together. "I'll let you ride next time, Sergeant. Word of honor."

Grady smiled. He could risk that kind of smile, now they were facing away from the big-wigs under the canvas shelter. "The pleasure's all yours, sir. If you ask me, it's a perfect day to imitate a bird—even if you are a bird on a string."

That, of course, was quite like Grady. From the beginning, Carter knew that his sergeant had yearned to make the ascent. Now that the die was cast, he was quite willing to step aside and wish the captain luck. Perhaps some sixth sense warned him that the captain would need luck this afternoon; perhaps, despite his breezy manner, he was quite satisfied to remain on the ground, *pro tem*. . . After all, there would be other ascents in time. Perhaps in the heart of that same scrub where they had campaigned so long, and so fruitlessly.

The balloon, Carter observed, had begun to swell like a giant's Easter Egg. Already, it had lost its resemblance to a caterpillar: as the silk distended, it had begun to take on a rough spherical shape. Simpson jerked tentatively at the guide-rope, and the balloon bounced gently in its sandy bed, as though it were already anxious to leave the earth.

"Perhaps I should get in the car now, Grady?"

"Give 'em a moment more, sir, if you please. That War Department bloodhound is already sniffing for trouble. It'll look better, if we know just what we're about."

"How can we, when this is the first time?"

"Sorry, sir—but the general told Eccles that we'd been carrying on these tests for months before he came down from Washington."

Carter kicked the sand with a polished boot, and glared covertly at Grady. "Why wasn't I told of this before?"

"Sorry again, Captain. I'm afraid it slipped the general's mind."

It was not the first time that Grady had brought this kind of information through the commander's back door. If it seemed, on occasion, that Grady and the general were planning the whole Seminole War between them—with an occasional assist from Brevet-Captain John Carter, in the way of window-dressing—that same Captain Carter had long since ceased to complain. War on the edge of a rough-and-tumble frontier, he had found, was fought by other rules than he had learned at West Point. Sometimes, he suspected, both Grady and the general had discarded the rule-book altogether.

"Is this supposed to put me on my mettle?"

"Have you disappointed us yet, sir?"

Carter found he was smiling again. A pair of Yankees far from home, this was not the first time they had answered one question with another.



GRADY spoke with his eyes on the expanding silk bag before them. "Look at it this way, Captain. Our Mr. Eccles comes roaring down from Washington by packet, full of vinegar and suspicion—just because he hears that we've had the brass to try

out a new contraption, without a by-your-leave from him. Naturally, it's going to impress him if a West Pointer goes up in the thing—and shows that it works, after all. On the other hand, say the general sends me up. Say I break my neck. He'd only laugh—"

"And suppose I break my neck, Sergeant?"

"You won't, sir. Not with me down here to steady you."

Grady dropped the thought in the middle, and ran across the hard-packed sand at a shout from Simpson. The balloon, bouncing crazily as the gusts of hot air distended it in earnest, had cleared the ground at last. A quartet of regulars, anchored to the setting of the car, steadied the tugging bag while they waited for the sergeant to add his brawn.

Watching Grady anchor both heels in the sand and lean his full weight on the guide-rope, Carter thought once again how much his sergeant resembled a well-trained gorilla. The resemblance was heightened at this moment by Grady's naked torso: certainly the man was quite well-muscled, and only a trifle less hirsute. But the wink that Grady tossed in his direction was quite human. They've hatched something, thought Carter dourly—and I'm in the middle, as usual. No matter what happens on this beach today, they mean to keep this equipment for their own. Somehow, they'll make the War Department foot the bill, no matter what sort of report Eccles sends in.

"Easy does it, sir," said Grady. "We're ready when you are."

Carter squared his shoulders, and verified the mirrored perfection of his boots. Then he marched to the balloon, as crisply as though he were receiving a color-guard in the plaza across the bay. With one hand on the basket, he offered his general a ramrod-stiff salute—a strictly military salute that failed to include Mr. Samuel Eccles. Behind the War Department nabob, Mr. Hector Lamb (an intrepid gnome, even in this moment of climax) held up two crossed fingers.

"Steady all!" shouted Grady. "Don't mind if she bounces a little at first, Captain," he added in a sibilant monotone. "You'll get used to it before you get sick—I hope."

Carter favored his sergeant with a quick glare, then swung a magnificently booted knee into the basket. Once again, he checked its contents: telescope and map-case, a dozen freshly-sharpened sketching crayons, a row of signal flares he would drop when he was high enough. A flask of brandy which Mr. Lamb had offered with his compliments in case the captain was troubled by high altitudes.

"Uncouple her, Simpson," said Grady. "The captain's as ready as he'll ever be."

Corporal Simpson jumped forward to fasten

Grady anchored both heels in the sand and leaned his full weight on the guide-rope.



the valve at the neck of the silk bag—a lever with a deep ratchet, that clicked home with an ominous air of finality. The hot-air hose slithered to the beach with an angry hissing, a collapsed boa-constrictor that had had its day. Carter glanced aloft, and saw that the balloon was yearning in its rigging now, for all the world like a blue meteor about to spurn the earth forever. Perhaps I'll feel just like this when I die, he thought absently. Perhaps the heavenly chariot that whisks us to our reward has a shape much like Hector Lamb's contraption. And, he added gloomily, perhaps we should have used our heads and fought this war on the ground.

"Don't forget the valve, sir," said Grady easily. "Uncouple that iron ring if you want to come down fast. Uncouple it anyway if I

spread two red flags on the ground. That'll mean the ground-wind's too strong for us to pull you down."

Carter said, just as easily, "You've told me that a hundred times, and my memory's excellent. You may cast away, Sergeant."

"Cast away, Simpson!"

CHAPTER II

TEST FLIGHT



HE WAS aloft, as simply as that. Trying to pin down the sensation later, he knew that he had given himself no time to be afraid—at first. He remembered how the four regulars had bounced back from the rigging, and flung themselves on their backs, as pre-

cise as circus tumblers. Grady, at the guide-rope, had merely relaxed his swelling biceps a trifle, letting the hemp slip through his hands before he dropped it entirely. The rope, its first thirty feet coiled neatly at the sergeant's feet, snaked after the ascending car. Beach and dunes flattened under Carter's feet, and he knew that he was away in earnest.

The black Hercules at the hot-air furnace, his labors ended for a time, leaned on his shovel and shielded his eyes against the glare to look upward. The big-wigs under the canvas shelter had already burst into the open for a better view—and Carter was glad that they, too, must shadow their eyes against the burning cobalt of the Atlantic.

Abruptly, he realized that the group on the sands below was incredibly small, and getting smaller by the second. The hollow square that was his company, which had seemed secure as time a moment ago, had all but merged with the endless white ribbon of the beach. He felt his head spin in a sudden touch of vertigo as the balloon lurched, then steadied. The taut yellow line of rope below him was his only link with the earth now, and it seemed a frail one at best. Brevet-Captain John Carter closed his eyes briefly, and admitted that he had never been quite so afraid before—or so alone with his terror.

The wave of panic passed with his dizziness, and he forced himself to open his eyes and look about. He had no way of judging his height, but he assumed that Grady had paid out perhaps a third of the rope on the spool. Leaning out a trifle from the rim of the basket, he could just make out the pygmies straining at the handles of that stout metal drum far below him—and dared to guess that the ascension had proceeded according to plan, so far.

He felt his vertigo returning, and cured it promptly by staring at the horizon, as Mr. Lamb had advised. A sip of brandy would have helped it even more, but he resisted that temptation firmly. Instead, he settled on the observation-seat (it was a mere wooden strut within the car) and spread the map-case on his knees. It was a detail map of the defenses of St. Augustine, drawn to scale; the general had asked that he mark each spot as he recognized it, then re-draw a rough copy from this bird's-eye vantage point.

Strange, how quickly it all came clear from this dizzy height. Yet the perspective was strange, too—especially when he looked to north and south, and imagined he could already discern the curve of the earth, at the misty-brown edges of the barrens. The Atlantic was *enfer* of course: a blue riffled floor, dancing with waves inshore, marked with an occasional whitecap as the offshore wind freshened. The ocean had always seemed round and endless;

it was an odd sensation to watch the earth itself take on that same circular dimension.

Already, he could mark the sandbars at North Inlet, the sick green of the marshes on the bay side of Anastasia Island, the bay itself, curving to meet the point where St. Augustine was built. There was the Charleston packet, at anchor off the seawall. There was the Castillo, with the flag of Union proud at its sentry tower, the sun flashing on its moat, the geometric pattern of its terreplein suggesting the forts he had built as a boy when his mind still ventured on its own youthful crusades. . . . There, to the north was the gray mass of the City Gates, and the King's Highway winding into the scrub beyond. There, along the crumbled line of the old city wall, St. Augustine had turned out en masse to watch him emulate the gulls. He adjusted the telescope, to verify the presence of the townspeople on the old Spanish ramparts—and wondered if, from that distant vantage-point, he looked as lonely as he felt.

He filled out his sketch-map rapidly: the marshes behind the town, the long blue line of Matanzas Bay, the military road that crossed the pine-barrens to the northwest. The road led to Picolata on the St. Johns; already, he could mark down the river clearly, judge its width, estimate the quality of the terrain beyond. Thanks to the war, the west bank of the St. Johns was Indian country now, a place of gutted farms and weed-grown roads, of jungle creeping back across more than one abandoned quarter-section. St. Augustine had long been crowded with farmers' families who had fled to the protection of the old town's walls.

Some said that the hostiles, flushed with their early victories and supplied with arms from Cuba, might dare to storm St. Augustine itself. Carter, who had hunted those same Seminoles on more than one occasion, could discount these old wives' fears. The enemy had seldom risked a stand-up fight with the regulars; the enemy preferred to burn and pillage in sudden raids—and vanish into the heart of its swamps again.

Take Twelve-Mile Hammock—to name one of the major hideaways. Every Indian-fighter in the First Infantry Regiment knew that several hundred braves lurked somewhere in the green stillness of that swamp—and every Indian-fighter longed to come to grips with them on any terms, whether the battle must be joined in the open prairie, or among the cypress knees of the hammock itself. . . . Sketching the limits of Twelve-Mile Hammock on his drawing-paper, Carter felt his heart pound with new hope. If he could outline the whole swamp clearly from this vantage-point (a good half-day's march away), the results from the west bank of the St. Johns would be

startling indeed. He need only risk an ascension in the dark to pick out the location of the Indian camp-fires, which the tangled jungle growth had always obscured from view. A forced night-march, an enveloping movement just this side of dawn, a warning volley to advise the Seminoles that they were trapped at long last. Bowlegs was a stubborn leader, but he was no fool. He might well surrender without firing a shot.



CARTER came back from his dream of the perfect battle as the car jerked warningly underfoot. The balloon was dancing wildly in a blue immensity all its own; when he trained his telescope on the beach below, Carter saw that they had paid off the last inch of rope on the spool, that Grady had already spread two flags on the sand, the signal to the aerialist to open his valve and ease the pressure on the straining cable. There was no mistaking the fact that the wind had strengthened in the last few moments. His telescope told him that the sawgrass and the yuccas along the shore were laid flat by the sudden blast; the visitor from Washington, his shoulders hunched, had already retired to the canvas shelter.

Here in space, the balloon itself had begun to pirouette like a mad blue dervish. Carter snatched twice for the lever that controlled the pressure within the gyrating silk bag before his fist closed on the metal handle. The rush of hot air all but scorched his face and neck as the vent opened at last. At that precise moment, the whole balloon bounded skyward, with the momentum of a bird just released from a snare. Carter's telescope whipped back to the beach again, in time to pick up Sergeant Grady, who had twined the guide-rope about his arms just as it snapped free of the spool.

It was a grotesque picture: he found he was laughing, despite his own obvious peril. From that height, the half-naked sergeant looked more like a gorilla than ever, as he bounced from dune to water's edge. Corporal Simpson had already tackled Grady's legs, in a final effort to anchor the guide-rope to earth again; one of the regulars made a running dive, and, for an instant, seemed to cling to the corporal's heels with teeth and fingernails. A wave combed over their shoulders as the madly tugging rope lifted them skyward. Carter watched them dangle there, a good six hundred feet below him, like three sausages on a string. Then, as the rope threatened to hoist them skyward in earnest, they plummeted into the sea, one by one. Grady was the last to go, but Grady went in style: a double somersault in mid-air, and a knife-clean plunge into deep water a hundred yards off-shore.

Carter watched his sergeant break surface in the glassy ground-swell; more porpoise than gorilla now. Grady blew the water from his head in one mighty snort, and coasted inshore on the back of the next wave. The frayed end of the guide-rope danced nimbly along the face of the sea, as the balloon settled a trifle—then whipped taut as a slender tail to a comet, and followed the bag skyward.

For the next quarter-hour, Carter could only anchor both fists in the rigging and pray. Twisted as it was by the wind, the wicker car no longer offered him a foothold. He watched his telescope, map-case and brandy spill out (like eggs from a careless grocer's basket) and was helpless to retrieve them. He did not quite dare glance back at the beach, to measure his present distance from land. The wind was shifting gradually to the northeast; perhaps it would push the balloon back to safety in time. It was impossible to risk a dive at this giddy height; the guide-rope, securely braided into the pattern of the car-basket, eluded his questing toes, as he strove to lower himself to its level and slide down to the sea's floor, like an acrobat in reverse.

The sun was low above the dunes of Anastasia Island—and the island itself was only a remote black smudge against the crimson edge of evening—when he felt the wind change. By now, the blue silk bag above him had begun to sag in earnest, though the balloon still bounced crazily upward with each new puff of breeze. He was perhaps three hundred feet above the water when the first wave creamed below him, but the wind had begun to shift to the south, now. These crazy gusts often shifted direction as the cool of evening came on; lifted on this new, strong cushion of air, the balloon might easily dance across the mouth of the inlet and whirl out to sea again.

He tugged with all his strength at the netting, but the balloon obstinately refused to sink, though the silk seemed to hang in shreds about the core of buoyancy that remained. He kicked off one varnished boot and then the other, and wished he dared to follow their mad dive into the sea. Rocked in a whorl of wind, the balloon spiraled inshore again. Carter heard the rattle-crack, even as he felt the netting shiver in his anguished grip. He saw Grady, then, a firm-legged colossus against the sunset, just as the sergeant whipped another rifle to his shoulder. Even from the crest of the highest dune, the odds were against a second hit—but Grady fired almost casually, without seeming to take aim. Hot air screamed through a double rent in the silk; the balloon (a discouraged caterpillar once again) arrowed seaward, with Carter's weight as the guiding point.

Just in time, he managed to free himself from the tangle of netting, and plunged clumsily into the teeth of an oncoming wave.

For an instant, the vast blue envelope of silk threatened to engulf him, along with the green wall of water. But he knew that the vagrant breeze, which had threatened his life a moment ago, was his savior now—lifting the collapsing blue caterpillar above the water for a moment more, giving him his chance to coast with the crest of the wave and swim clear.

In another moment, he had staggered into the shallows, and Grady's hand was firm at his elbow.

"You got out of that nicely, sir. Better luck next time."

"Will there be a next time?"

"That's something you'll have to ask Mr. Eccles, Captain."

Then they both came to attention where they stood as the general himself waded knee-deep in surf to take part in the rescue.

CHAPTER III

EYES FOR THE ARMY



SAMUEL ECCLES was speaking. "The moral is obvious, gentlemen. If God had meant man to fly, he would have given him wings. In my opinion, Captain Carter got off lightly this afternoon—very lightly indeed."

Mr. Hector Lamb, alert as a bright brown sparrow in an oversize easy-chair, made a prayer-book of his hands, but did not reply. Carter, firmly planted in the other easy-chair that graced the general's headquarters in St. Augustine, opened his mouth to answer the challenge, then thought better of the impulse. Instead, he stared hard at the general himself, who was pacing his carpet grimly, with his hands folded under the long tails of his dress-uniform. It was a long time since the old warlock had been quite so agitated. A spoiled child, reflected Carter, could not have pouted more pointedly when his nurse had deprived him of his favorite hobby-horse.

"Do I understand, Mr. Eccles, that you refuse us funds?"

"I've no other choice."

"Even if I insist that today's trial was no fair test? If the guide-rope had not snapped away from the spool—"

"Let's put that another way, sir. Luck was really on your side today. If the wind had not shifted when it did, Mr. Carter might still be swimming at this moment—or floating towards the moon."

Carter found his voice. "At least, we've proved that detailed maps can be drawn from such observation points. As much of the interior is still uncharted, an observation balloon would be of great value in our campaigning—"

"It would also advertise your presence to the hostiles, Captain."



Mr. Hector Lamb made a prayer-book of his hands, but did not reply.

"Not if the ascent were made after dark. The hour after sunset is the Seminoles' favorite time for curing meat over their cook-fires. Heretofore, we've been unable to locate their encampments from ground level. From the air, it would be a simple thing to—"

Eccles slapped the desk-top for silence. He was seated in the general's own chair. Obviously, he quite enjoyed presiding at this impromptu council.

"I have spoken my mind, gentlemen. When I return to Washington, Mr. Poinsett, our Secretary, will ask my opinion of the use of balloons in war. I will advise most strongly against their use—now, or later."

Hector Lamb spoke for the first time. His deep voice belied his sparrow's body. It was one of those voices created to compete with a church organ.

"Are you aware that both the French and English have experimented with balloons for years?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you realize that three aerialists abroad traveled more than five hundred miles by balloon, in eighteen hours?"

"Mr. Carter might have traveled even further today—and drowned for his pains."

Hector Lamb leaped from his chair. Despite his spindly figure, there was something commanding about the man. An inner fire, that burned all the brighter for the cold blankets of reality.

"Why close your mind to the future, Mr. Eccles, simply because a rope broke today?"

"I can only repeat, sir, the balloon has no

future, save as a dangerous toy. Man must learn to fight his wars on the ground—and leave the atmosphere to the birds."

The argument had continued in this vein for some time. It was, reflected Carter, futile to argue with the man from Washington, when he held all the trumps. Obviously, he had come down to inspect this Indian war with a set mind. The events on St. Augustine's Beach had merely confirmed his pre-conceived veto.

The general, still pacing, paused to fix Eccles with his best glare. "Suppose I insist on using Mr. Lamb's equipment?"

"The question is academic. Mr. Lamb's equipment has foundered at sea."

"It was salvaged an hour ago," said the inventor. "The rents in the bag are easily repaired—and I have a brand-new balloon in storage at the Costillo."

"For which you ask the Department to pay you a thousand dollars, cash in hand?"

"Cost-price," said Lamb. "You will perceive I'm a patriot, sir."

"I perceive that you're the sort of dreamer the Army can't tolerate."

The general barked his way into the discourse. "So you refuse the funds?"

"Absolutely and finally."

"What if I write to Poinsett, and demand them?"

"Write and be damned, sir. Our Secretary of War has confidence in my judgment. That's why he sent me here to—how shall I put it? inspect your conduct of this war at first hand."



SOLDIER and civilian faced each other across the cluttered Army office. To Carter's amazement, it was the soldier's eye that dropped first. He felt better when the general resumed his stumping of the office carpet, and threw him a broad wink in passing.

"My apologies, Mr. Eccles. Naturally, your word in Washington will close the matter. It only happens that I'd counted on proving the worth of the balloon to the Department."

"Your apology is accepted, General. Will you ask Mr. Lamb to leave your office, while we discuss plans for my tour?"

The inventor got up without a word, and stalked out with hanging head. Another schoolboy who's been scolded for dreaming out of turn, thought Carter. Obeying an obscure surge of pity, he got up to open the door for Mr. Hector Lamb. The inventor acknowledged the courtesy with a wan smile, but did not raise his eyes.

"Shall I leave too, sir?"

"By no means, Jack," said the general—and, once again, he offered Carter that elaborate wink, with his back still turned to Eccles. "Haven't I told you that you're to be our visitor's guide?"

Carter rose to the occasion, as nobly as he could. "May I say I consider myself very honored, Mr. Eccles?"

"The pleasure's mine, Captain. It's a rare privilege to have an educated guide in this corner of nowhere."

"Were you planning to inspect our forts to the south?"

"By no means. That's a tour of duty I'll leave to the military. My object is to visit what I believe is known as Indian country along the St. Johns River."

"You can ride out and back in a day, sir—more's the pity."

The general barked his way into the conversation once again—and his smile was grim as a wolf's. "Hadm't you heard, Jack? This isn't a Department matter. It's a courtesy to Mr. Eccles himself. He's writing a story for a Boston magazine—and making sketches." He turned to Eccles, with elaborate politeness. "Sorry I can't spare you more than a squad, but Sergeant Grady will see that they're picked men—"

Carter kept his staff-officer poise intact. "How long did you plan to tour along the river, Mr. Eccles?"

"A night's bivouac should do, I think." The man from Washington smiled thinly—and Carter found that he detested him cordially, if only for that smile. Harvard was in the too-precise tilt of his neck in its snow-white stock—Harvard and a sheltered life on Boston Common, dedicated to literature, high tea, and well-breed sneers for the common world outside. Why Mr. Samuel Eccles had ever done anything so vulgar as apply for a government post was probably a mystery not worth solving.

The general spoke sharply. "You'll stay at Picolata, of course. I wouldn't trust you in the open country, even with Grady to stand guard."

"But it's essential that I see as much of the country as possible, General—"

"Why? It's all alike."

"May I be the judge of that?"

"Wait till you've ridden a whole morning on an Army road. You'll agree with me. In fact, you'll be quite content to sit inside the stockade at the boat-landing, and cool your heels in the river."

Eccles grimaced, as though the word-picture had obscured another image already cherished in his mind. "Allow me one more question. Is Captain Carter in charge of this little expedition, or am I?"

"Captain Carter is responsible to the War Department for your safety. Naturally he's in charge."

"I yield the point. The captain, I am sure, will anticipate my wishes." Eccles rose precisely, and drew down his immaculate cuffs. "We ride out early tomorrow!"

"An hour before dawn," said Carter. "It's well to get a start before the heat sets in."

"In that case, gentlemen, I think I'll retire at once. Mr. Emerson has praised the St. Augustine air, but I find it enervating."

The general snorted just once, as the office door closed on their visitor. "Weren't you a Harvard man once, Jack?"

"Briefly, sir."

"Still, he recognizes you as a blood brother. You should be honored."

Carter met the old warrior's glare with all the innocence he could muster. "Should I, really?"

"It's nice that he trusts you. You can take

him anywhere—show him anything you like—and he'll think it's all in the interests of literature."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow, sir."

"I want those balloons, Jack. I want dozens of 'em for the next campaign. I want to prove, once and for all, that they're useful—that an army can't have too many eyes. In short, I want to make Mr. Eccles change his mind, before he reports back to Washington and the Secretary of War."

"Has Mr. Eccles changed his mind, ever?"

"I'm hoping this little tour of the scrub may work a miracle."

"But how, sir?"

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THE general's smile was both benign and wolf-like, now. The sort of wolf who has planned his next kill and is at peace with the world.

"Grady has the details, Jack."

"Grady always has the details."

"I beg your pardon?"

Carter recovered, as smoothly as he could. "I only meant—is this something unofficial?"

"Highly," said the general. "You'll ride out tomorrow, to the Picolata station, with a distinguished visitor from Washington—and points north. You'll give him every opportunity to observe the ravages of an Indian war. If possible, you'll bring him back to me in one piece—"

"And if I can't do that?"

"Perhaps he'll have a lesson in Indian-fighting at first hand," said the general. "I needn't remind you that Bowlegs has been restless lately."

Carter frowned. "Only last week, a farmhouse was burned to the ground not a mile from Picolata. On our side of the river. Are you suggesting I take him to visit the ruins?"

"I'm making no suggestions at all. As I said, the tour is your responsibility. At the same time, I'd humor his whims—when I could do so with safety."

"Perhaps I should talk over the route with Grady, sir."

"Perhaps you should," said the general. He was already at his desk, his nose buried in a report. The swish of the quill pen made a partial ambush, but Carter knew that his commanding officer was still grinning behind his whiskers.

In the anteroom, Hector Lamb sat with vacantly staring eyes, the picture of despair. Carter let a reassuring hand fall on his shoulder; without knowing why, he felt that the inventor's investment had not been quite in vain. Then he accepted the sentry's salute in the colonnade outside, and stalked into the soft Southern night.

The general's officers occupied a suite of rooms in what had once been the Spanish governor's residence on the plaza. Carter paused for a moment on the flagged walk, and breathed in the peace of evening. As always, the tranquillity of centuries seemed to brood over St. Augustine. A peace that had no traffic with the wilderness that had menaced its gates, ever since the little city had been founded. . . . The cathedral bells chimed the hour as he walked under the canopy of live-oaks. He had already identified the spark of the cheroot in the darkness, and the aroma of Cuban rum, as part of Sergeant Grady's aura. The sergeant had waited before, under this same venerable live-oak, when a campaign was in the making.

"I hope Mr. Eccles is resting well, sir. He'll need that sleep tomorrow."

"Tell it from the beginning," said Carter. "If I'm in charge of this tour, I must know everything."

Sergeant Grady came to attention—and cupped the stump of his cheroot neatly in one palm. He held the pose (and no one knew better than Carter how casual a pose it was) until a brace of privates from their company had passed, en route from the St. Francis barracks to the bodega across the plaza.

"It's really very simple, sir. The general wants Mr. Eccles to take a good story back to Washington—and Boston. He feels that a writer can't write his best, unless you give him his head. That is, if he insists on crossing over to Bowlegs' side of the river—who are we to stop him?"

"Stop me if I'm wrong, Grady, but are we taking more than a squad?"

"Simpson and six men, sir. All mounted dragoons."

"Stop me again, Sergeant, but is that enough for Indian country? I don't want to hurt your feelings—or Mr. Simpson's—but Mr. Eccles must be protected."

"Easy does it, Captain," said Grady. "Would Mr. Eccles know Indian country if he saw it? Would he know a Seminole from a Cherokee?"

"I still don't follow."

"You will, sir. Just give me time."

Grady leaned closer, and began to whisper. The aroma of the general's best rum (which still clung to the sergeant's person like an all-but-visible perfume) was no more stupefying than the sergeant's words. Carter found that he was blinking at first—then nodding—then grinning broadly in the night.

Looked at from any angle, this promised to be a wilderness junket that Mr. Samuel Eccles would long remember.

CHAPTER IV

MANEUVER EXECUTED



THIS time, the canvas on Mr. Eccles' easel was no larger than a good-sized sheet of letter-paper; the cluster of flaming hibiscus that was beginning to take shape there was—by the artist's own admission—a thing of beauty. A clean eye, a tight mind, and a loose brush, said Mr. Eccles, were the principal ingredients of any first-class painting.

He had been working most of the afternoon on this bit of still life—a well-tanned, Byronic figure in his doeskin riding breeches, his shirt open at the throat, his small, keen eyes riveted on their work. Oddly enough, Mr. Eccles had borne the rigors of a week's camping in the scrub with high good-humor. Carter was convinced that he had enjoyed every moment enormously—whether he was swimming in a

wilderness lake at dawn, riding through the piney-woods at high noon, or reading Keats by firelight to a politely attentive Grady. Carter was also convinced that he had relished the spice of danger most of all—and had relied completely on the eight mounted regulars to protect him.

Obviously, he was relying on them now, as he bent closer to the easel to apply the finishing touches. Carter leaned back against the bole of the big yellow pine, and conned the landscape with an alert eye. It was pleasantly cool here in the pine-grove, now that the heat of

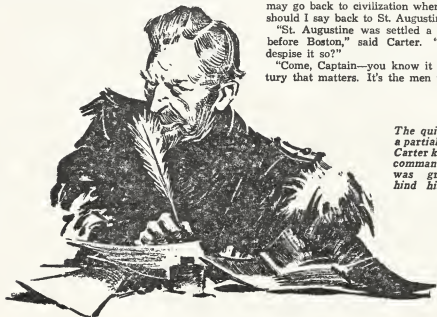
studded banks. The river, too, seemed contemptuous of man's efforts to carve a niche for himself on its rim.

Eccles had already sketched the crumbling stone chimney, and the white skeleton of the cow in the ruins of the corral; Eccles' portfolio was overflowing, now, and so was his notebook. Carter came out of his half-doze as the War Department big-wig snapped his campstool shut, and rose from his canvas with a dramatic flourish.

"Fini, mon Capitaine!" After a week in the open air, Eccles' voice had taken on a robust vibrato that set Carter's teeth on edge. "We may go back to civilization when you like—or should I say back to St. Augustine?"

"St. Augustine was settled a few centuries before Boston," said Carter. "Why do you despise it so?"

"Come, Captain—you know it isn't the century that matters. It's the men that dominate



The quill pen made a partial ambush but Carter knew that his commanding officer was grinning behind his whiskers.

mid-day had begun to ease off a trifle; he could pity Grady and the others, as they sat at attention in their saddles—eight men on the qui vive, fanned out in a rough arc to cover the limits of the gutted plantation, their eyes boring the encroaching scrub for the first hint of Indian-sign.

A farmhouse had stood in this pine-grove once, but only the fieldstone chimney remained. Grass and wild-grape had crept over the ruin long ago; the hibiscus-flower that Eccles was painting with such care had sprouted in the sandy earth where the front doorstep had been—a pathetic reminder of the crude frontier "garden" some housewife had planted here long ago. Palmetto roots had begun to invade the forty-odd acres of clearing beyond; in another year, the scrub would have moved back to claim this man-made corner as its own. A hundred yards to the west the St. Johns (vast as a still, chocolate-dark lake) glided sluggishly between cypress-

it. St. Augustine may be hoary with age; it will be a frontier post until the end of time."

"Do you expect Florida to remain a wilderness for ever?"

Eccles gestured dramatically at the dense wall of vegetation that all but crushed this pioneer farm-site. "Look at the face of nature, Captain. Let it answer you."

Carter kept his temper with an effort. "Why did you go into the War Department, Mr. Eccles?"

The visitor raised his eyebrows in debonaire surprise. "We all serve our country as best we can. You kill Indians, when you can find them. Your general makes grandiose plans for a flying army that will frighten those Indians into surrendering. I, as befits a realist, merely exercise my veto—and move on to inspect another Army outpost. Don't hold that veto against me, Captain. In my way, I'm useful too."

In the week just past, they had debated the

subject exhaustively, over more than one bivouac fire. It was, Carter admitted, useless to argue with a man who had made up his mind twenty years ago. But he heard his voice go on regardless.

"You think Florida will never be rid of the Seminoles—never be civilized?"

"I think we'd have been wiser to let the Spaniards keep it."

"What of the war with Mexico? That's bound to come within our lifetime."

"I think that's more of the same madness. We won our freedom as a seaboard nation, with a seaboard culture. Now we're spreading ourselves thin across a continent. Sapping our strength to tame a wilderness. Burning out our brains to solve the problems created by our own greed. We could have held what we won in the Revolution, and made it a thing of beauty. Instead, we are ruining ourselves by trying to grasp a world." Samuel Eccles closed his portfolio with an oracular gesture. "I say it's madness, and I refuse to be part of it."

"Your pardon, Mr. Eccles. A moment ago, you called yourself a realist. Actually, you're a hopeless romantic. It's the general and I—yes, and Sergeant Grady—who deal in realism."

"Because you devote a lifetime to chasing Indians?"

"Because we're making Florida safe for settlement. Because we know that Americans, not Europeans, must do the same for the whole continent—and do it fast. Because we know we must be strong to make our peace with Europe. How long would your seaboard republic last, if a foreign power held the wilderness behind it? Who is better fitted than we to take over that wilderness, and make it serve us?"



ECCLES' thin lips curved in a smile. "Spoken like a patriot, Captain. I had no idea that a West Pointer could be so eloquent between battles. I shall still advise Mr. Poinsett that empire-grabbing is dangerous, when I return to Washington. Not to mention balloons that escape from their inventors' hands—"

A catbird sounded its raucous, whining cry, deep in the scrub beyond the clearing. Carter had waited a long time for that signal. Now that it had come at last, he felt his whole body relax in happy anticipation. It was high time to carry out the first part of Grady's plan. He wondered if it would move Mr. Eccles, where words had failed. He wondered if anything short of a scalping knife would convince Mr. Eccles that he was in error.

Grady, at the clearing's edge, half-rose in his stirrups, and fanned himself pointedly with his broad-brimmed campaign hat. Carter bare-

ly nodded as he gave Florida's distinguished guest a hand up to his stirrup.

"Let me take your portfolio tonight, Mr. Eccles. And your notebook. It'll go in my saddle-bag, I think—"

The visitor sat easily in his saddle, a slim, erect figure against the waning day. Once again, Carter wondered if Eccles was perpetually sitting for his own portrait. Perhaps he was only planning the article he would write on this barbarous corner of America—and the part he would play in it. The wise observer, who could afford a tolerant smile while the brash young officer argued that a strong army was essential to an expanding Union. The graceful stylist, who could twist that same young officer's words—making his concern for national safety sound like a ruthless grab for power.

The catbird repeated its raucous cry, and Eccles turned in the direction of the sound. "I must complete my list of bird-calls, Captain. What is that species?"

Carter smiled amiably. From this point on, he expected to enjoy himself thoroughly. "It could be a catbird. Or a Seminole, signaling to another."

Eccles stiffened in his saddle. Already, he looked more angular than graceful against the red backdrop of sunset. "I'd swear it was a bird."

"Grady thinks differently."

The sergeant was already approaching at a hand-gallop, hugging his pony with tight knees and cupping his hands to shout a warning. Simpson and the others had swung behind him with military precision; both corporal and regulars had served in a dragoon regiment before they were dismounted to fight in Florida. A flying wedge of cavalry, thought Carter, was one of the finest sights of war. Unless it is a War Department big-wig, pale and shaking in his saddle as he faces his first real threat of danger.

There was no more time for rejoicing. They were part of that hard-riding wedge now, streaking for the faint trace of a wagon-road that led up from the St. Johns to the open piney-woods.

Grady said, a little breathlessly, "The scrub's alive with bonnets, sir. If you ask me, they spread out all around us this past hour, while Mr. Eccles was sketching—"

"Never mind that now, Sergeant. Can we ride through them?"

"We can try, sir. Unless they've got ponies too. Then we're done for." Grady swooped to catch at Eccles' bridle, as their visitor reeled in the saddle. Eccles recovered smoothly enough, after they had maneuvered his mount to the center of the wedge. Carter, holding the breakneck pace at the apex of that flying triangle, could afford to smile inwardly. Eccles

'had been ready enough to sneer at the United States Army a moment ago. He accepted its protection, just as readily, as they galloped toward the red menace that seemed to leer at them from every palmetto fan.

There was no sign of hostiles as they entered the scrub, still holding their tight formation on what remained of the wagon-road. The wall of palmetto, water-oak and wild-grape shut off the sunlight instantly; they were riding now through a green half-world, where every shadow was a nightmare in the making, every sound the twang of a released bowstring. In the past two years, Carter had cut his way through many such nightmares; he could still remember how the cold hand of the first had closed about his heart.

Mr. Eccles' pale cheeks took on a faintly greenish hue that matched the vegetation perfectly. It deepened noticeably when a thrown tomahawk missed his head by a safe six inches, and shivered haft-deep, in the bole of a tree ahead. The arrows came then, in a scattered volley, fanning the air on both sides of the track, sending each head in the squad into the horses' manes.

"Here they come, sir," said Grady in the easiest of whispers.

"Break!"

"Break and scatter, you squareheads!"

The command was hardly needed. Even as Carter bellowed it—and Grady dutifully echoed—the flying wedge had split into separate fragments. Ten wildly galloping horsemen, streaking for the open barrens beyond. Sabers flashed in the sunset, as the regulars made a path for those crashing hooves. The Seminoles, still perfectly ambushed in the palmettoes, sent another flight of arrows winging overhead, and made the green gloom hideous with their war-whoops.



CARTER rode last now, as a good commander should. His own sword was out, daring a savage to show his head above the dog-fennel. When Grady blazed away at a palmetto-clump, he followed suit. When Grady's saber pointed for a glade in the piney woods as a rallying point, he gave his pony a free rein, and headed up the slope at a breakneck gallop.

It was over then, as quickly as it had begun. The tall live-oak, making a green tent at the meeting-place of scrub and open prairie. Grady and Eccles, riding close together under that spreading canopy, the soldier bracing the panic-stricken civilian in his saddle. The length of rawhide, whipping down from the leaves like an alert brown snake, the lasso settling about Eccles' shoulders, and lifting him from his saddle—as neatly as though some monstrous puppet-master were seated on a

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hidden limb above. Grady, sending a shot winging into the leaves, and sawing madly on his bit to swing back to the rescue—though Eccles had vanished long ago.

No one spoke, as Simpson and the regulars re-formed about their leader. No one budged, as Grady rode into their midst and saluted smartly.

"Maneuver executed, sir, according to plan."

They sat quietly in their saddles as Eccles emerged from the heart of the live-oak—a puppet still, and still kicking feebly, though it was evident that the performance was over. The lariat still supported him neatly, just below the shoulder blades; his head was encased,



Eccles' head was neatly encased in a croker-sack; his arms bound behind him with strips of rawhide.

just as neatly, in a croker-sack; his arms were bound behind him with strips of rawhide. Two Indians rode out of the dog-fennel as he appeared, like actors answering their cue; another appeared on foot, leading Eccles' horse by the bridle; the third brave separated the captive's knees with easy competence, and placed him squarely in his saddle again. During this business, a fourth warrior plummeted from tree to earth, and turned to offer Brevet-Captain John Carter a salute no less crisp than Grady's.

A low whistle brought two more shaggy ponies out of the leafy shadows. The two Indians still on the ground mounted in quick, running leaps. The quartet, boxing Eccles in their midst, vanished into the scrub with the celerity of phantoms that know just where they are going, and why.

"If you ask me, sir," said Grady, "that was as pretty as any of his poems."

"Quite as pretty," said Carter. "And much more to the point."

The little group of horsemen rode into the wagon road again, wrapped in a contented silence. Grady did not speak until they had crossed the deserted farm-yard, and Carter's pony was cooling its forelegs in the St. Johns.

"Georgia Joe will be at Twelve-Mile Hammock by midnight, sir. Don't let that worry you."

"Do I look worried?"

"To be honest, Captain, I never saw you look happier."

Carter smiled at a memory all his own. "It's hard to picture Mr. Eccles, riding all those miles in silence."

"The crocker-sack will be off by now, sir. He can talk all he likes."

"Somehow, I imagine this is one occasion when he'll hold his tongue. You don't suppose he's had a heart-attack?"

"Gentlemen of that stripe don't die so easily, sir."

"Suppose he finds out that he's been captured by four of our best scouts?"

"Georgia Joe's too slick for that, Captain. Joe could call himself Osceola—and make me believe that Osceola had come back to haunt us. They're dressed like Seminoles, all of 'em. They'll talk nothing but Seminole, from now on. Why shouldn't they be Seminoles, as far as Mr. Eccles is concerned? How can he guess that they're four Creeks, working for the general himself? And why shouldn't they give him something to tell the folks back in Boston?"

"To say nothing of the folks in Washington?"

"If you ask me, sir, that part's our job. Shall I break out the signal?"

Carter shrugged off his doubts. "Whenever you like, Grady."

As always, his sergeant was taking a crisis in his stride; the fact that Grady had planned the kidnaping of Mr. Samuel Eccles to the last detail—and arranged the even more ticklish sequel to follow—seemed to rest lightly as a feather on the sergeant's conscience. Admitting that much, Carter found that his own conscience was strangely dormant. Mr. Eccles would suffer keenly in the next few hours, there was no denying that. But it was the kind of suffering that Mr. Eccles had truly earned.

Precisely what would happen if their visitor discovered the truth about his present captivity was something else again. Carter preferred not to dwell upon it, at the moment. Instead, he tossed his bridle to Simpson, and dismounted from his pony to wade hip-deep in the river, while Grady broke out a guidon of the First Dragons on the spongy bank above.

The chocolate-dark water was cool against his skin, soothing the last of his weariness away. The good Florida mud sucked at his toes like the handclasp of an old friend. Eccles was wrong, he told himself solemnly; this hungry, sunbitten land was well worth civilizing. He, John Carter, was part of that task. Though he raged at its slowness now and again (and at the stupidity of the powers-that-be) he would continue to do his job—even if it involved the hoodwinking of the War Department itself.

He felt a lump choke his throat as Grady's signal was answered from the far bank of the St. Johns. The paddle-wheel launch that swam out of its cypress nest and nosed into the channel was ungainly as a giant beetle, and quite as dingy. But the candy-striped flag that danced at her stern was a brave augury for the future. So, for that matter, was the figure of Hector Lamb on the foredeck.

Carter saluted them both where he stood. With that gesture, he felt a familiar calm descend upon his mind. The die was cast, now, the battle planned. From now on, he would rely on his luck—and Sergeant Grady—to see him through.

CHAPTER V

A TRAP FOR BOWLEGS



TWO hours later, the Army launch *Consuela* bumped doggedly downstream, with the lazy push of the current behind her. The *Consuela's* fires were banked, her hissing boiler throttled down. She had made excellent time since she had picked up two passengers on the western bank; like a wise lady, she would not be early to her next rendezvous.

In the tiny cockpit, Carter drew thoughtfully at his cheroot as he studied the map spread

on Grady's knees. Mr. Lamb had gone forward long ago to visit with the pilot, a good civilian who knew enough to keep clear when Army business was afoot. Aside from the frenzied pant of the boilers, the hard slap of the paddles in the stream, no sound broke the deep peace of the Florida evening. They were too far out to hear the insect threnody in the jungle hammocks that now lined both banks. It was hard to believe that eight hundred hostile Indians were camped somewhere in that tangle of vegetation. That sometime before morning, a battle would be joined in that same sub-tropic jungle. That Brevet-Captain John Carter, and none other, could light the fuse at will.

"Put it this way, sir," said Grady. "Come morning, the general's made up his mind to go after Bowlegs with all he's got. Say we can mark his camp in that gumbo, before the attack begins—the general pivots that way, blocks out the area with his forward echelons, concentrates his fire. Say we pin-point it, on this map—Bowlegs is in a vise by morning. A trap so tight not even a cottonwood could get out with his skin—"

"Say we don't."

"Only if you insist, Captain. In that case, we come down to earth with the first volley, and pitch in too."

"What about Eccles, in that event?"

"If I know Joe, he's moved his prisoner as fast by land as we've moved by water. My guess is, he's bedded down this minute, within hailing distance of our lines, and sent his compliments to the headquarters command. Which means, of course, that Mr. Eccles will be rescued—if that's the right word—five minutes after the battle is joined."

Carter blew a smoke-ring at the cabin lamp, and considered the picture intently. An Indian bivouac, in the heart of a nameless thicket, with the Indians' captive thrashing in their midst. A burst of shots, that seemed to come from nowhere—followed instantly by the gleam of bayonets in the faint starlight. Ringed by Army steel, Mr. Eccles' captors would be captives in their turn. Mr. Eccles himself, liberated at last, would stumble through the darkness with a new soldier-escort, to tell his story to the general. . .

Grady echoed his captain's chuckle—and accepted a cheroot from the captain's morocco case. "Maybe there was a simpler way. But I doubt it."

Carter found he was enjoying his cheroot more with each contented puff. "Tell me more, Grady. It bears repeating."

"Put it any way you like, sir, Mr. Eccles is bound to learn something tonight. 'Course, the general will pin him down where he can't get hurt. If things move on schedule, no one will be hurt much. Not even Bowlegs."

"Unless he stands and fights."

"Bowlegs isn't the kind of Indian who fights when he knows he's in a box with just one door. If you ask me, Captain, he'll be the first to come out of that swamp with his hands in the air. If that doesn't impress Mr. Eccles, I don't know what will."

"You've ignored the main point. Will Eccles give full credit to the balloons?"

"How can he help himself, if he watches the whole show through the general's night-glass?"

Carter weighed that point carefully. He pictured Eccles, a full-fledged member of the command post, standing at the general's elbow with a spyglass trained on the horizon. Eccles, gaping despite himself as battle-signals were given, and received, from an observation point eight hundred feet in the sky. The picture was a bit vague at the edges, but he clung to it obstinately. Even a Harvard man of Mr. Eccles' pattern could change his mind at the proper moment. How could he fail to indorse the principle of the observation balloon, when it was demonstrated before his eyes?

He forced an objection he did not feel, if only to test Grady's reaction. "Suppose he can't see us from High Prairie?"

"Look at the sky, sir. He can't be that near-sighted."

"Bowlegs may see us too, and shift his fires."

"Bowlegs had plenty of contraband in his camp. But I doubt if it includes a night-glass. Indians mostly like to hug their council-fires after dark. It's one of the few things you can count on, in this kind of war—"

"I'm aware of that, Grady."

"Then why are you scowling, sir? Easy does it tonight, if you ask me. We've got Bowlegs where we want him—and Mr. Eccles has a front-row seat. Even money says that the Department will soon be buying balloons."

"I won't bet against my own wishes, Grady. But suppose you're wrong?"

"The Army's hand are still clean. The general has already bought his present equipment, out of his own pocket. Cash on the barrel, like a private citizen. What's more, we're on leave as of now. Watching this battle from a pair of captive balloons, as any private citizen has the right to do. Is it our fault if we drop a few flares, and the command-post takes 'em as signals?"



THEY both turned to the cabin door as the pilot called a low-voiced warning down the deck; Grady closed the door carefully before he followed Carter to the bow. They had rounded the last bend as they talked; now, the next long stretch of river lay before them, a dark mirror for the stars, its surface flat as oil. Already, the boat had begun to nose cautiously toward the west bank. The



Bowlegs

pilot doused his riding-light as he received an answering wink from the wooded shore.

This, reflected Carter, was true Indian country, as distinguished from the deserted terrain far upstream, where Eccles had been "captured" that afternoon. For six months, now, Bowlegs had sent out raiding parties almost at will, secure in the knowledge that no force the general could muster was capable of pinning him down in the swampy fastness beyond. Carter lifted a night-glass to his eye and swept the shore. From where he stood, the hammock seemed empty as the moon, and just as deadlly still.

"Where's our landing-place?"

"A quarter-mile downstream, sir."

The chunk of the paddles had ceased while they talked; Carter knew that the pilot would ghost in with the current, with no further advertisement of his presence.

"Who gave that signal?"

"One of our scouts, Captain. They're posted along the bank, from this point on."

"And the balloons?"

"Both furnaces are stoked now, Captain." It was Hector Lamb himself, purring like a contented cat in the dark. "Admit I've ambushed the fires well."

"Won't they tangle in the trees of the hammock?"

"My men have cut lanes for the take-off."

"Apparently you think of everything, Mr. Lamb."

"Everything but Mr. Eccles. I'm glad he's been invited too, gentlemen."

The inventor's chuckle followed them into the cabin again. Carter made sure that the lamp was not showing—and unbuttoned his tunic against a sudden clamminess that went deeper than the miasma of heat that hung

above the St. Johns tonight. Grady had already spread the map out briskly for a final look.

"Here's the whole terrain, sir. Twelve-Mile Hammock, the river on the east, High Prairie on the West, North and South Slough—"

"Suppose we can't make out those landmarks by starlight?"

"It's a chance we're taking, sir. That's why we've risked sending the balloons up from the riverbank."

Carter measured the red-inked rectangles that marked the two take-off areas. "Are these drawn to scale?"

"Perfectly, Captain."

"I see no reason why the balloons should be a whole half-mile apart. For that matter, why does the general insist on two observers? Surely one man can give him all the facts he needs."

"It's safer if we plot that swamp from two points, sir. Besides—"

"Out with it, Grady. Don't you think I can read a military map?"

Grady's aplomb was flawless. "It's only this, sir. One of us might be interrupted while we were signaling."

"Interrupted?"

Grady put a pudgy brown finger on the map. "As you know, Captain, we've only a skirmish-line along the bank. Bowlegs isn't likely to run for the river if he's cornered—"

"Why couldn't the balloons be sent up from High Prairie?"

"In that case, they'd be part of Army equipment; Mr. Eccles would smell a rat at once. Besides, Lamb had to bring his furnaces by boat. Not even a mule-skinner could get 'em through that scrub in time."

Carter nodded gloomily. He had hoped for a stronger guard at the point of ascent—but Grady was right, as usual. The general needed every man he could muster for the actual attack on Bowlegs. It was also quite true that Mr. Lamb's observation balloon would be most effective behind a fixed front; a mobile field army, hunting Indians over the entire peninsula, would always have trouble transporting the equipment—and more trouble protecting it from sudden raids while it was actually in operation. But these were problems for the future to solve. Tonight, they would ascend from the bank of the St. Johns, signal the position of the Seminoles—and take the risks.

It would be lonely enough, up there in the black void. The others could worry about what might happen on the ground tonight.



GRADY'S finger was still tracing the four segments into which the map of Twelve-Mile Hammock had been divided. "Shall we check our reference points again, sir—just to be absolutely sure?"

"By all means." This, after all, was the nub of their scheme. It could easily fail, unless they established the limits of those four neat squares, marked out on the map in precise red ink. A duplicate would be resting on the general's knee, as he scanned the sky from High Prairie. It was a crude method, at best; but if Bowlegs could be located definitely in one of those four squares, the United States Army could box in his encampment with a fraction of the force needed to invest the entire swamp.

Grady's finger traced the symbols inked at the top of the map. "Main force here, sir—on high ground. Dragoons, and mobile infantry. Flanks established, at the head of both sloughs. They'll move in when they get the sign from us, and not before."

"Suppose we can't give an exact map-reading?"

"We can't help ourselves, Captain—once we locate those council-fires. Even by starlight, those two sloughs are bound to give back some reflection from the air. Bisect 'em so—with your rule; rule out the end of the hammock at the top of the map, and Bowlegs is bound to be sitting in one of four squares."

"I'm to signal first, is that clear?"

"If you're still there, sir. Otherwise, I have the honor." Grady considered that point intently. "Perhaps we'd better plan to drop the same flare, regardless. You first—then me. Give the command-post its reading twice, instead of once."

"Suppose the general misunderstands?"

"How can he, sir, if we space it right?"

Carter yielded the point. The squares on both maps were numbered consecutively; by dropping one to four flares, the observer in the balloon would indicate the precise point of attack. It was the Army's game, from that point on. The observers would merely stay aloft, dropping another flare to warn the command post, should Bowlegs take alarm, or show any signs of moving his camp. As plans go on paper, there seemed little chance that it would miscarry.

Carter spread his own hands across the map, and tried hard to bring the picture into focus. Now it was cold parchment no longer, but a jungle hammock deep in darkness. He moved cautiously with the two extended flanks, as commands were whispered down the line. Wheeling slowly with the main body of troops, the two arms would ghost into the heart of the hammock, feeling their way toward a meeting place in that bland darkness, touching the skirmish-line that would be moving in from the riverbank at the same moment.

In an hour—or less, if the hammock turned out to be as dry as the scouts' reports would indicate—Bowlegs would find himself at the center of a tightening circle from which there was no escape. Then, at last, the observer

could come to earth, with a chapter of military strategy written firmly in the record-book.

The *Consuela* shivered gently as her bow touched land. Carter rose from his chair in the cabin, and folded his map into its case, a gesture which Grady duplicated instantly. Utter blackness invaded the cabin as Carter blew out the light and stepped on deck. He saw now that the launch had nosed deep into a nest of cypress-knees. There was no sense of emerging from cabin to open air; the blackness about him seemed unchanged until he caught a glint of eyeballs just ahead, and realized that the pilot was waiting to hand him ashore.

"Scouts reporting, sir. Everything quiet and in order."

An all but invisible hand closed on his elbow, easing him from the gunwale of the *Consuela* to the spongy vegetable mat of the swamp. The springy muck was silent underfoot, as though a giant mattress had been stretched between the cypress boles; he breathed the familiar, brown reek of swamp-dust as he felt his way with cautious feet. Luck would be with the general tonight if all of Twelve-Mile Hammock was as powder-dry as this stretch along the river.

"See you in heaven, sir," said Grady.

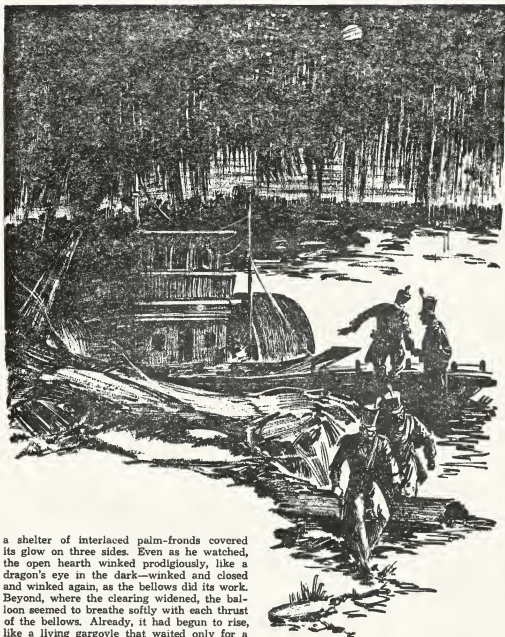
The sergeant was only a disembodied voice, at first; then Carter saw a brief silhouette against the sheen of the river, as Grady followed another invisible guide along the bank. The *Consuela* was already a dim bulk on the water, gliding gently toward midstream in the tug of the current. Hector Lamb, more wraith-like than ever against the stars, waved a forlorn farewell before he vanished into the pilot-house. There was a kind of eerie benediction in that farewell, as though the inventor was surrendering the fruits of his labor into the captain's hands, for better or worse. . .

"Right this way, Captain. You can't miss the path."

He dodged under a moss-hung branch, and climbed over the gnarled roots of a mangrove that all but blocked out the sky. The scout held out his hand a second time, but Carter could find his bearings unaided now. I've fought in worse light than this, he thought, and lived to tell the story. Then he remembered that he would sit far above the fighting tonight.

"The lane's dead ahead, sir," said the scout. "There's the fire. As you see, we did our best to screen it from the land side."

Beyond the spread of the mangrove, the pattern was definite. Busy machetes had carved a swathe in the jungle, a precise rectangle that shone like a living screen wound in the starlight. The hot-air furnace, Carter observed, was well hidden in one corner, where



a shelter of interlaced palm-fronds covered its glow on three sides. Even as he watched, the open hearth winked prodigiously, like a dragon's eye in the dark—winked and closed and winked again, as the bellows did its work. Beyond, where the clearing widened, the balloon seemed to breathe softly with each thrust of the bellows. Already, it had begun to rise, like a living gargoyle that waited only for a pair of wings to soar into the sky.

The scout bent over the wicker car, and cupped a lucifer in one palm.

"Did Mr. Lamb overlook anything, Captain?"

Carter peered into the tilted basket. The flares were neatly arranged in their pocket; the night-glass under his arm was duplicated, in case of breakage. There were even a pair of Army carbines lying in an oilskin case on the floor of the car. He stripped aside the covering, and laid his hand against a stock—

An all but invisible hand closed on his elbow, easing him from the gunwale of the Consuela to the spongy vegetable mat of the swamp.

comforted, as always, by the hard reassurance of steel against his palm.

"We'll move in on your signal," said the scout. "You'll have two men on the spool—Mose, and his helper at the furnace. Yank twice on the guide-rope when you want to come down. Cut open the valve in case you want to come down fast—"

"This isn't my first ascension!"

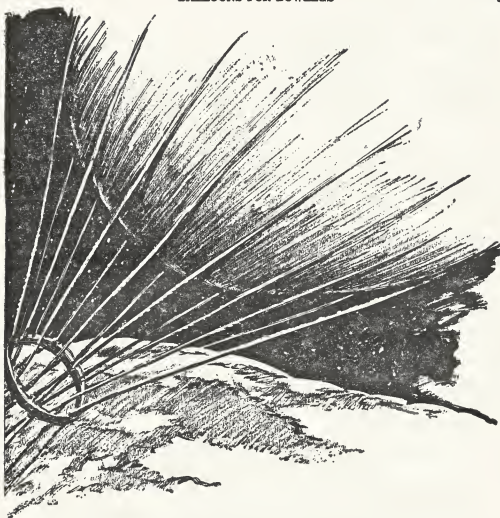
"Beg pardon, sir. I didn't realize we had veterans in this Army branch. Have you any instructions?"

"I've one question. Suppose Bowlegs is camped in this corner of the swamp? Suppose he breaks for the riverbank in force?"

"In that case, Captain, I'd advise you to cut yourself loose, and pray for a safe landing."



At first, he thought that his glass had picked out a swarm of fire-flies, dancing in solemn formation somewhere in the middle distance.



Carter blinked angrily at the dark, but the scout had already gone about his business. Grady, he thought, could look in the face of death with the same easy assurance. He could see Grady now, following the riverbank with magnificent aplomb, ready to take an identical risk in the second balloon. Nursing that cheering picture, he climbed into the wicker car and sat waiting with folded arms.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE ROPE



HE HAD expected the darkness above the earth to be incredibly lonely; actually, there was something almost comforting about the black silence of space, when the car steadied, then swung easily after the last

jerk of the guide-rope. At this precise moment, he felt remote as a god and almost as powerful; his divorce from the world was all but complete. Tonight, the balloon was his servant. He felt that he could soar at will, until he touched the first of the stars sown so prodigally across the Florida sky.

His night-glass swept the horizon to the north for some sign of Grady. He found the second balloon instantly, in the act of rising, like some dark meteor, from the jungle's heart. The two observation posts were perhaps a half-mile apart. The balloon itself was barely visible in the night, a sphere of deeper darkness that betrayed its presence only in the way it blocked off the stars. It was good to share his solitude with Grady, even at this far remove. Good to know that he was not quite alone in the vigil that lay ahead.

The night-glass swept downward, to seek his anchor eight hundred feet below. He felt his scalp prickle when the telescope failed to mark the taut line of the guide-rope in the Stygian immensity. Nor was the man-made clearing visible at this height—though he could sense its presence there in the endless, black-matted shadows of the hammock. A lighter shadow, outlined faintly by the pulse of the furnace, dim as a foundered moon in the jungle's heart . . .

Somewhere down there in the darkness (though it was small comfort now) he knew that a brace of Negro grooms were anchored hard to the spool of his guide-rope, waiting patiently for his signal to return him to the earth. At the moment, it was hard to believe that he was bound to terra firma, even by that tenuous cord.

The clammy terror left him by degrees, as he remembered his mission. The glass swept the horizon, first of all, noting the lighter shade of the pine-barrons on the high ground above the swamp. There, well-masked in the palmetto scrub, his commanding general awaited the signal to join battle; there, at the meeting place of scrub and hammock, the wings of the attacking force bated their carbines and watched the empty sky, no less eagerly.

The glass swept in a narrowing arc, picking out the thin silver ribbons of North and South Slough, enclosing Twelve-Mile Hammock in the identical limits defined by the map on his knee. Then—and then only—did he dare to probe the black fastness of the swamp itself, to seek out the tell-tale gleams of Bowlegs' council-fires.

At first, he thought that his glass had picked out a swarm of fireflies, dancing in solemn formation somewhere in the middle distance. Then—as his heart began to thud in earnest—he blinked at the phenomenon with his naked eye. The fireflies were real enough, hugging the earth in a half-hundred pin-point gleams a good league to the southwest. A half-hundred smudges and cook-fires, deep in a jungle glade—screened completely from any eye on the ground, wide-open to his questing glass. He forced calm upon his racing brain and began to count them—as carefully as Cadet John Carter had calculated co-ordinates at the Point, not so long ago.

His hand was quite steady as he struck a lucifer, well within the protection of the wicker car, and conned the map. There was the slough to the south—bisected into its eastern and western sections. There was the line of the prairie and piney-woods, that limited the hammock on the west. Still holding the flame of the match above the map, he went back to the spyglass, to check the location of those camp-fires once again. Mesmerized by

their steady, confident winking, he let the match burn his fingers before he came back to his map. But there was no doubting their location when he took his bearings with a second lucifer. Bowlegs was camped tonight (with squaws and livestock, to judge by the count on those fires) well within the southwest corner of Twelve-Mile Hammock.

Carter let out his breath in a long, contented sigh. With Bowlegs camped a safe three miles from the observation balloons, there was no chance that he would try to break through to the St. Johns. A quick flanking movement on the Army's part, to cover South Slough with a solid wall of guns, and Bowlegs was trapped.

Even as he glanced toward the dim, circular shadow that was Grady's balloon, he felt his hand close on a signal flare. Grady, he was sure, had made the same move long ago; Grady, as befitted his rank, was merely waiting for him to drop the first flare. The rough wooden handle of the torch was reassuring to his fingers. For all that, he fumbled two lucifers before he could hold a flame to the tinder. It took all his self-control, but he made himself hold the stick well below the rim of the car, until the flame was burning steadily. Then, using a full-arm swing, he pitched it overside. From the second balloon, another flare curved earthward like a busy comet—as precisely as though Grady's arm, and his own, had been operated by the same set of muscles.

One flare for square number one. . . Would the general, squatting like a patient thunderbolt on High Prairie, be able to read the signal correctly?



HE FORGOT to worry as he leaned out from the rim of his basket to watch the flare plummet down to the swamp. It burned brightly to the end: he saw the clearing from which the balloon had risen, the sweat-polished backs of the two Negroes leaning hard on the spool of his guide-rope, the gaunt, encroaching shapes of cypress and blue-gum. He could even count heads in the skirmish line fanned out in the swamp to the west—and knew that every eye had marked the spiral of that blazing comet. Just as surely, he knew that the whole line would surge silently forward the minute that blackness descended on the clearing.

One flare for square number one. . . The officers down there were working from the same map as he—like the main body to the west, they could not fail to converge on the proper corner of the swamp.

He turned his glass toward Grady's balloon again. Perhaps it was his imagination, but he was sure that the wicker car had gone into a slight but definite curtsey, as though the ser-

geant had just shaken hands with himself in the dark.

Maneuver accomplished, according to plan. The rest was in the lap of the old warlock on High Prairie.

For all that, Carter found the next hour a bad time indeed. He admitted freely that he would have been far happier as a member of that skirmish line—lost, an eon ago, in the depths of the swamp, ghosting with perfect confidence toward its objective. Stalking an Indian encampment was a game he understood. A dangerous game, but a familiar one, the sort of game a man could play to the hilt, sure that a comrade-in-arms snaked through the underbrush on either side. Here, with only the stars for company, there was too much time to think what might happen if his signal had miscarried. If Bowlegs had a night-glass, after all, and had marked that flare from the depths of the swamp. If the Seminoles were shifting camp even now, and letting those fifty fires burn on as a lure. . .

The fifty fires still winked in the darkness when the first shot cracked out. A faint and lonesome sound, like a phantom twig snapping in the heart of midnight. And then, a half-dozen twigs snapped in unison, a ragged volley muted by the leaves—but a sure sign that Bowlegs, not the United States Army, had opened hostilities. An Army volley, as Carter knew, would have been more precisely timed, more deadly in its very sharpness.

So far, the enemy was blazing away half-blindly at shadows, even as he extinguished his camp-fires, one by one.

It was still unreal to watch a battle joining at this distance—and this height. He heard the Army answer Bowlegs' first defiance, saw the white plume of smoke drift upward from the swamp; he watched a giant blackjack oak spout into flame at the very edge of the hammock, and guessed that the envelopment was now complete. Ready-made illumination for night-fighting was always available in the Florida swamps, where the very density of the vegetation choked many trees into premature death, leaving them dry as monstrous candlewicks. The general (who knew this phenomenon as well as any man) would never touch off his battle lights until the last squad had wheeled into the line and was poised and ready for the kill.

A dozen of those giant candles roared into action as he watched; the underbrush between hissed into flame, ringing the hostiles into a pattern that was made to order for a quick surrender. Carter found that he was leaning perilously forward, with a cheer bursting from his throat; he did not need to glance toward Grady's car to know that it was dancing as madly as his own.

The night-glass picked out segments of the



A brave was tomahawking one of the Negro grooms who manned the spool.

fight, and each segment throbbed with the joined menace of flame and lead. A high, full-throated scream, cutting the darkness below him, seemed oddly out of key with that panorama. His mind did not grasp its purport at once; his glass swept the western sky one more time before he turned it downward.

A savage jerk on the guide-rope all but tossed him from the car. Something had gone terribly wrong below; he could see that much, before his eye could pierce the blackness. He found that he had tossed a flare overside, with no conscious planning. One of the loaded carbines was at his shoulder when it sputtered to life five hundred feet below. In that interval, the gyrations of the basket had steadied to a relentless groundward pull. Before the flare snuffed out, he saw a sweating black body vanish in a copper maelstrom; the scream repeated, wakening echo after echo among the cypress.

Carter dropped a second flare, and a third, and sighted at a yet invisible target. A Seminole came into the sights as the flare burst above the clearing. He never remembered firing, though he saw the Indian crumple and go down. He counted a score of braves milling in the clearing. Most of them seemed to be engaged in tomahawking the second of the two

Negro grooms who had manned the spool a scant moment before. A half-dozen others, with far more deadly precision, were tugging at the guide-rope with bursting muscles. Already, it seemed to Carter's eyes that the car was about to graze the treetops.



HE SNATCHED up the second carbine, and fired blindly into that thicket of red limbs. A hand slipped on the guide-rope—and the balloon, granted a sudden reprieve, soared up into darkness again. Carter breathed deep, and fought hard to pin down his jumping brain. There were no more than thirty braves in the clearing. This was no counter-attack on Bowleg's part. By sheer bad luck, a raiding party (returning to camp in the darkness) had stumbled on the clearing, chopped down the Negroes at the guide-rope, and taken over. . . . A glance at Grady's balloon told him that it was dancing just as wildly as his own. Evidently the party had moved in from the St. Johns, cached their canoes along the bank, and pounced on the custodians of the balloons without giving any warning.

That much was easy to deduce. By the same token, the roving Seminoles could have no knowledge of the systematic annihilation that was taking place a good three miles to the west. A hunting party that was willing to tackle any game, they had merely seized upon this new toy of the white man's, and were dragging it to earth to investigate. What they would do to the observer—once they had grounded him—was anyone's guess, but Carter did not pause to speculate.

It took something beyond courage, a quick hardening of purpose that exploded into action without pausing for thought. He was over the side of the car, anchored by one arm, his feet swinging drunkenly in space. His clasp-knife was already between his teeth. For a moment of sheer agony, he was sure that the guide-rope was beyond his reach, even now—two furious slashes of the blade cut nothing but empty air.

With the third anguished try, he felt steel touch hemp, but it was only a glancing blow. The treetops of the swamp reeled closer, as new hands grasped at the rope below.

He swung his feet into the car again, anchored both knees to the rim, and hung head-down in one last effort. Strangely enough, it was easier to work in this position. The underside of the car glowed palely, as though the wicker had been rubbed with phosphorus. He saw why, when he twisted his neck and glanced downward. The Seminoles had fired the underbrush deliberately, spilling the coals from the hot-air furnace to speed their work. Already, the clearing was snapping with a half-dozen

fires, which lighted the balloon and its writhing occupant with merciless clarity.

He heard a bowstring twang, and felt the arrow hiss by his ear. The second try quivered home in the car itself, so close that he felt his cheek brush under the fierce vibration of the shaft.

His knees loosened, and he saved himself from falling with a tremendous effort. as the knife bit into the guide-rope in earnest. Another stroke, and he could feel the hemp give under the blade, as the tug of the balloon above him matched the pull below. A third arrow pinned his sleeve to the car, but he ripped away for a final stroke—feeling the car leap upward, feeling himself rise with it like a jack-in-the-box bouncing on a hidden spring.

At that precise moment, the whole clearing seemed to burst asunder. The roar of the explosion still numbed his eardrums when a second detonation blanketed the first. He looked down just once as he climbed over the side of the car again, and braced himself instinctively for the upward rush of the balloon. The fire seemed to spout with the blast; then the earth settled, and was still. If there was still life in that clearing, Carter saw no sign of it as he soared up through the night toward the quiet stars. . . .

Looking back on it later, he knew that he had fainted for a moment of sheer relief. But Grady's voice was distinct, as his senses swam back to normal. You could never dream from Grady's voice, even at a time like this.

"Easy does it, sir," said Grady. "Is it my fault the sutlers put gunpowder in my car as ballast?"

Carter blinked twice, and looked again, but the sergeant was still there—serene as time in his own wicker basket, the netting of his own balloon swaying gently in the breeze. The two vast circular shadows—and they did seem big as minor planets now—had almost touched, here in the immensity of sky. Drifting gently side-by-side, they seemed to be following a set course, with all the casual ease of ships on an uncharted sea.

"Don't look so startled, sir," said Grady. "Naturally, I'd drift in your direction, with the breeze from the north. This contraption steers well enough, if you can manage to pull the right ropes."

"How on earth did you. . . ?"

"I've told you, Captain. They came at my station first, with murder in their hearts. Seems they thought my balloon was some sort of unknown monster, with an overlong tail. First thing they did was cut the rope, and send me about my business—" The sergeant chuckled in the darkness, his face a serene half-moon; his words could hardly have been more casual if they had been chatting on the portico of the



He was over the side of the car, anchored by one arm, his feet swinging drunkenly in space.

St. Augustine barracks. "So I came over to see if I could help you."

"Are you telling me you steered that balloon for a half-mile?"

"Easy as a catboat in a following wind, sir. 'Course, it helped, having you anchored at one spot, as it were. If you ask me, I didn't drop

those powder-bags a minute too soon." Grady tugged hard at the netting; for an instant, his car spun wildly, then steadied under the steady lift of the silk bag above, as the balloons swam gently over the black heart of the swamp together.

"See what I mean, sir? Don't ask how she'd

behave in a storm; tonight, she handles like a witch."

Carter cursed fluently in the dark—and, even as he cursed, found that he had duplicated Grady's business with the netting. "D'you realize we'll be over the battleground in another moment, at this rate?"

"Naturally, sir. Afraid there's no help for that. Balloons can't tack into the wind. Not yet at any rate. You've got to let 'em take you where they will, and coax favors out of 'em in between."



A SHARP down-draft swept them earthward before the cars steadied. The wind was from the northeast quarter now; and pushing them inexorably into the area of combat. Carter braced himself to face this final ordeal; somehow, it was infinitely easier, with Grady jockeying his own car within conversational distance.

"What would you give for our chances, Sergeant?"

"Even money, sir, if we don't stop a stray bullet. That's one trouble with Indians—you can't depend on 'em staying with a target—"

"We're losing height fast."

"That's to be expected too, sir. There's lots of hot air in the world, but the supply don't last forever."

Carter glanced up at the silk bag of his own balloon. It still seemed fairly taut, though there was no escaping the sibilant warning of escaping air. Could one of those arrows have ripped the surface after all?

"Do you notice any tear anywhere in the bag, Grady?"

"Don't give it a second thought, sir. That's my balloon that's hissing like a Scotch bag-pipe with a cold. Will you keep your fingers crossed for me?"

"Maybe you'd better move into my car, while there's time."

"Maybe I should at that, Captain. Much obliged for the suggestion."

The balloons swayed closer, as Grady leaned on the netting. There was still four hundred feet of empty air between them and the tree-tops, but the sergeant stepped across it with his calm unshaken. Someone shouted at them from the blackness below—a hoarse Yankee voice, a welcome assurance that they were passing over their own lines. Grady settled into the car beside Carter, and waved at the invisible voice.

Grady's balloon, so suddenly freed of his weight, bounced cheerfully away, despite the hiss of escaping air; their own car, after a sickening moment of indecision, steadied on its course and moved easily westward with the breeze behind it.

"Give that breeze five more minutes," said



A squaw ran screaming across the camp-ground with a suckling pig.

Grady. "I think perhaps it can save us yet."

Carter nodded grimly, without turning away from the holocaust ahead. At first glance, the whole hammock seemed to be in flames. Actually, the general's skirmish line had merely fired a wide half-moon of trees between slough and river.

Their rifles cracked constantly from out the darkness, picking out targets across that fiery wall as the core of Seminole resistance shifted toward the prairie to the west—and dwindled, just as inexorably, as small bands of hostiles broke free and ran into the garish, man-made daylight with hands locked at necks in token of surrender. The fire slackened for a moment as the balloon drifted across the burning battle-line. War-whoops, that had made the night hideous a moment ago, dwindled into awed-silence as both balloons whirled downward to within fifty feet of the blazing cypress heads.

"Hold your breath, sir," said Grady. "Here it comes."

Carter leaned out from the car, forgetting for once that a soldier must make himself small in battle. He saw more than one brave throw aside his musket and scuttle for cover. Eyeballs rolled in the dancing firelight as the balloon spun even closer. For an instant, he was sure that their car was afire, as it all but brushed the tops of the burning trees. Then, the expanding force of the fire pushed them

upward; the scorched earth receded, obscured by smoke, pregnant with the howls of savages threatened by an omen from the sky.

"Watch my balloon, sir," said Grady. "It's a good thing you took me aboard."

Carter turned just in time to see the empty car of Grady's balloon twist like a dervish in a smoky funnel ahead. Despite its comparative lightness, the bag had lost air fast. It was sinking now, with gathering speed, moving straight for a cone of burning cedars at the edge of Bowleg's camping-ground. At that moment, Carter felt that he was hanging motionless on the edge of a nightmare—that the empty, wildly plummeting balloon was its visible symbol. The tight knots of braves, the squaw who ran screaming across the camping-ground with a sucking pig clutched in her arms, were mere grotesque decorations to this tragedy in the making.

When the explosion came, he knew that he had expected it from the moment Grady had climbed into his car. He could not help staring—though the mushrooming glare nearly blinded him—as the balloon, bursting into flame like a gigantic flower, took its last wild plunge to earth. The silence that followed was its own tribute to that finale, though it was broken instantly by the shouts of the regulars, as they hurdled the fires on all sides and charged in with fixed bayonets to herd their prisoners.

"Gunpowder makes good ballast," said Grady. "Though if you ask me, sir, I'm just as glad to watch that from a safe distance."

The car yawed dizzily as he spoke, and Carter knew that the bag above them was bursting after all. But in the same breath he knew that they had drifted clear of the fire—though the open prairie was no less terrifying as it rushed up to meet them, along with his company's cheers.



IT WAS good to lie in the deep armchair on his balcony in St. Augustine, and watch the sun drowse on the garden below. Good to follow the progress of the Charleston packet (framed now, in a green tangle of banana leaves) as she cleared the sandbars of the inlet and nosed into the open Atlantic. Mr. Samuel Eccles would lose no time in telling the Secretary of War that balloons, and the United States Army, had nothing in common as yet. Mr. Eccles (to put things bluntly) had not enjoyed his glimpse of war at

first hand; at the precise moment when Grady's balloon exploded above the Seminole camp, he had been crouching in a cook-wagon and trying hard to be sick one more time.

So much for Mr. Eccles. The general had seen their visitor off this morning with surface decorum, and curses in his heart. But even the general's curses were tempered by the knowledge that nearly eight hundred coppery prisoners were confined in the stockades outside the Castillo, awaiting their transport to the west.

Carter shifted his arm in its sling, and glared at Grady. It was quite logical that he should sit here with a broken arm, while his sergeant had escaped their crash in the palmettos with hardly a scratch. Logical, too, that Grady should meet his scowl with his most soothing grin.

"Put it any way you like, sir—they'd never have taken Bowlegs without us."

"I still say we've lost. Two balloons ruined beyond repair. The inventor on his way north, broken-hearted. Mr. Eccles hiding in the general's wagon through it all, and insisting we made up the whole story."

"The general knows we didn't. So does every man in your company. 'Course, it can't go on the record—any more than the way we persuaded Mr. Eccles to attend the battle."

"Then what have we proved?"

"Only that it's good to be a pioneer, sir—providing you can stay alive long enough to think things over. Only that you can win battles pretty nicely from the air, as well as the ground."

Carter settled deeper in the armchair, and closed his eyes. The metallic whisper of the banana leaves, which had irritated him a moment before, was strangely soothing now. Grady had put experience in a nutshell, as usual: Grady and he had been pioneers at Twelve-Mile Hammock, even if their exploit must go unsung.

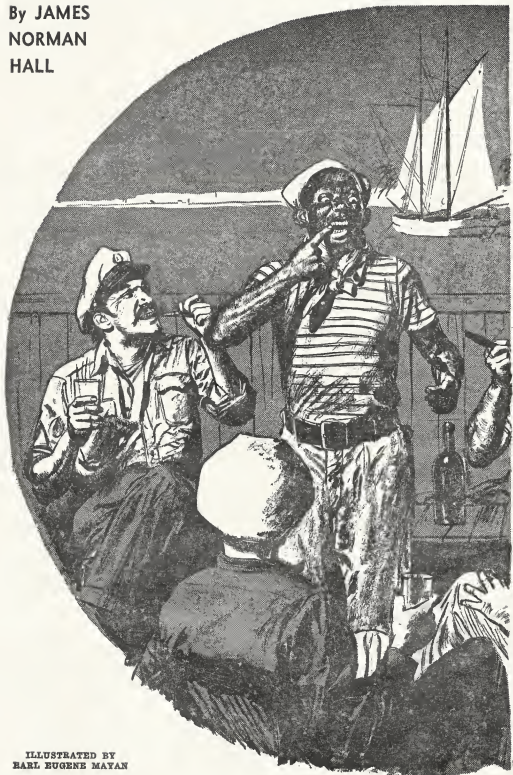
"You're right," he said slowly. "I'm glad we took the risk—now the surgeon says I can keep this arm."

Sergeant Grady snapped to attention, though his grin was intact; he seemed to be saluting something beyond and above the young officer in the armchair.

"My sentiments exactly, sir. There'll be other wars soon enough. And better balloons. If you ask me, it'll take more than Mr. Eccles to keep 'em apart."



By JAMES
NORMAN
HALL



ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN



UNCLE NED'S TEETH



MONSIEUR LARGETEAU, Nicholas McGoogin and myself were the only occupants that afternoon of the broad upstairs veranda of the Bougainville Club. Catastrophe had overtaken France the summer before, since which time her far distant Pacific island colony, Oceania, had been so nearly severed from contact with the outside world that it might have belonged to some otherwise uninhabited planet. The footworn stairs leading to the club veranda, with their once brightly-polished nailheads, now felt the tread of a mere handful of old-timers who climbed the staircase through force of habit. Refreshment of any kind was negligible. The only reminders of "the good old days" were the rows of dusty bottles, long since emptied, ranged on shelves behind the bar. Jules, the club steward—also through force of habit—stood behind the bar with a settled expression of puzzled unbelief upon his face; he could not yet realize what had happened to the bright world of yesterday. He served limeade, faintly colored with grenadine, with the same lack of enthusiasm displayed by those who ordered it.

It was one of those bland, cloudless afternoons so common in our part of the Pacific that we fail to remark them. A light breeze, refreshingly cool, ruffled the surface of the lagoon. The street following the curve of the beach was empty as far as the eye could see, save for a single Chinaman pushing his glassed-in ven-

*Ned blinded us with another grin.
"They's lend-lease, Mist' Largeteau."*

door's cart toward a pool of shade cast by one of the acacia trees that line the roadway. Having reached it, he too came to rest on a bench, as though giving up as hopeless an attempt to give a touch of purposeful activity to a scene that belied the need for it. Twelve miles away, the island of Moorea, outlined in palest blue, appeared and vanished from moment to moment in the sunlit haze, like the phantom of an island that was too beautiful to belong to the world of reality.

"There's the *Mama Tu* comin' in," Nick remarked, presently, merely, it seemed, to break the reposeful silence and emptiness of the club veranda. "Been out quite a while this voyage, seems to me."

The *Mama Tu*, a sixty-ton schooner, had just appeared around Faré Uté point. The breeze failed as she rounded it, but the schooner's old patched mainsail gathered in enough of what remained to carry her the last quarter-of-a-mile of her homeward voyage. She was the oldest schooner in the Group, but the name alone was all that remained of the vessel Joe Cheeseman's father had built back in the early eighties. She had been rebuilt, bit by bit as necessity demanded, and so had renewed herself half-a-dozen times over since those far-off days. She came alongside the wharf so handily that she seemed to have done it herself without any help from Joe.

"It'll be a better afternoon than we looked for," Monsieur Largeteau remarked, with a contented sigh, as we watched the sailors making the vessel fast.



WE understood what he meant. Joe Cheeseman and his supercargo, Henry Dee, were excellent company. They were like unequal parts of the same personality, either of which would have been lost without the other. Though each had his own singularities and angularities, they fitted together as snugly as adjacent bits of a jigsaw puzzle. You might have thought that two old copra-and-pearl-shell traders who had voyaged in company for better than forty years, visiting the same islands and groups of islands year after year, would have little that was new to say at the end of whatever voyage, but never with them were any two voyages alike; and they were as fond of one another's company as though they had met for the first time only last week. Even when alone they never seemed to be talked out and were as companionable in their silences as at all other times.

Chance loved them, and led the *Mama Tu* through a variety of strange experience enjoyed by no other schooner in our part of the Pacific. There were, to be sure, men who called Joe and Henry the most accomplished liars in French Oceania; nevertheless, I have never

known them to be trapped and brought to book. Their friends could expect anything but what was humdrum and customary when they saw Captain Joe and Henry coming ashore, and with them, Uncle Ned, the Negro cook of the *Mama Tu*. Ned came originally from South Carolina, but half a century in Polynesia had made him as native to the islands as the natives themselves. The three of them added to the gaiety of nations; at least, to the gaiety of islands, what little there is left of it, in these sad days.

Joe appeared first, at the head of the stairway, his white handlebar mustaches like a protecting screen behind which he slowly advanced. Henry is a small active man, quick as a weasel, but with a curious manner of walking as though treading on eggs, or amongst them, which he often did, of course, on the bird islands of the Low Archipelago; and at every step his head jerked slightly, like that of a hen in motion, but there was nothing hen-like in his character. The old Negro was the living embodiment of the Uncle Ned in Stephen Foster's song, with the happy exception that he was not blind. But "he had no teeth for to eat the hoe cake" and never had had within living memory. Imagine, then, the surprise of Monsieur Largeteau, Nick McGoogin and myself when the old man appeared wearing a grin completely filled with teeth, as white as the meat of a coconut and as even as the pickets on the fence of a Vermont dooryard. Joe and Henry had preceded him by several minutes but they had not prepared us for Ned's teeth; they'd not even mentioned them. Ned took his seat between them, all but blinding us by his grin, while the captain busied himself in fumbling at the string of a brown-paper parcel he held on his lap.

"Thought we'd have to whistle the old tub in, the breeze was that light," Joe remarked. "Well, we got here . . . Oh, Jules!"

"Nothin' but limeade, Captain, same as when you left," Jules replied, sourly.

"Is that so? You fetch me some glasses and cracked ice and a pitcher o' water."

Jules stared at him, then came forward. He halted midway between the bar and the table as though stopped by an invisible barrier. The captain glanced over his shoulder. "Brought a little refreshment, Jules," and with that he set a bottle on the table. It was a bottle of whisky—Scotch—Black & White. He then brought forth a box of cigars. Leaning far back in his chair he managed to worm his hand into a trousers pocket for his knife. Gently and carefully he pried open the lid of the box and replaced the knife in his pocket.

Any comment would have been inadequate to the occasion and none was made. To say nothing of cigars, a bottle of actual liquor had not been seen on the club veranda since the

summer of 1940—neither wine nor whisky, gin or brandy, beer or any such thing. Jules tiptoed to the table, took up the bottle, examined it without a word, and tiptoed back to the bar for the glasses, ice and water. "And one for yourself, Jules," the captain called after him. "You're gonna set right here with us and do the honors."

I shall not soon forget the expression of mingled unbelief and beatitude on Monsieur Largeteau's face when, the glasses filled, he lifted his own for the first sip. He rolled up his eyes in the odd manner common to him when confronted with the inexpressible; then he set his glass down with an air almost of reverence.

"Now then, Joe?" said Nick.

"Wait a minute!" said Monsieur Largeteau. "Let's get this in order. Uncle, where'd you get those teeth?"

Ned blinded us with another grin.

"They's lend-lease, Mist' Largeteau."

This seemed to call for comment, but none of us could think of anything to say. Monsieur Largeteau turned to the captain.

"Where you been, this voyage?" he asked.

"Where you 'spose we been? Down the Low Islands, of course."

"Joe, I wouldn't say a word more about it," Henry Dee put in. "They won't believe a thing we say."

Nick gave an incredulous grunt.

"The only dentist in French Oceania is right here in Papeete," he said. "Ned didn't have teeth when he left, this voyage, and now you're just back. You can't fool me, Uncle! You're wearing American teeth. The blacksmith of a dentist we got here couldn't have made 'em."

"Ain't that just what I said?" the old man replied. "Ain't no country got lend-lease 'cept Uncle Sam, is they? But I got to give 'em back right after the war. That's what the colonel tole me."

"The colonel? What colonel?" Monsieur Largeteau demanded.

"Capt'n Joe, you tell 'em," said Ned. He

chuckled as he added, "I can't hardly believe it my ownself, it all happened so quick."

"I suppose the whisky and cigars are lend-lease, too?" Nick remarked.

Captain Cheeseman nodded dreamily, letting the smoke curl slowly through the thicket of his mustache.

"Henry, maybe we better tell 'em. They won't give us a minute's peace till we do."



THAT was the cue Henry was waiting for. He wriggled his bony shoulders against the lumpy leather cushion at the back of his chair, trying to find a comfortable hollow to snuggle into. When they had a story to tell Henry carried the air, so to speak, with Joe furnishing the obligato and Uncle Ned weaving in flourishes, runs and grace notes for decorative and corroborative purposes.

"This war's different from any that's ever been fought," he began. "Even us old moss-backs out here in the middle of the Pacific knows that. It's a world war, all right, for everybody except us. Right where we are is about the only peaceful place that's left, anywhere."

"Get on with the story," said Nick. "Where you been, this voyage?"

"Down through the Tuamotus, like the captain said, clean to the Gambiers. We picked up three tons of coffee and fourteen tons of copra at Mangareva and started north again. Joe said, 'Henry, we might as well look into Naumia lagoon and set there for a bit.' That was O.K. with me. We needed some firewood for the galley and the Mama Tu wasn't in no rush to get home. So one night about a week later we eased in there just as the tide started running in the pass. Ever been to Naumia, Mister Largeteau?"

The Frenchman shook his head.

"You Frenchmen are funny. Your country is supposed to own these islands but you don't know much about 'em. There's no people on Naumia; it belongs to the natives of Hao. They



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come over once a year to make their copra and then go home again. The rest of the time it belongs to the sea birds and the hermit crabs."

"And one of these days, Henry, it's goin' to belong to me and you and Uncle Ned, if ever the price of copra comes back to where it belongs," the captain put in. "We'll buy it off the Hao people. I do covet that island for my old age."

"Where's the need?" said Henry. "It's as good as ours now and always will be, and we've got none of the fret of owning it . . . Well, in we sailed, just about dusk, and on across the lagoon nine miles to where the main island is. We hooked some fine fat tuna and palihere comin' through the pass, sixty and eighty pounders. One was more'n enough for a feed for the seven of us, but we was havin' such good sport we couldn't seem to stop. Whilst the rest of us was makin' the schooner snug in the cove, two of the boys went ashore, and by the time Joe and me went, they'd caught a fine lot of lobsters along the reef. They had plenty of coconut meat scratched, and before we was an hour older Ned had a supper ready that was a supper."

"I've et roasted crabs and lobsters in Sydney years ago," said the captain, "and in Frisco years before that, but there ain't no cook that's got a hand at sea food to come up to Ned."

"Now that you got your teeth, Uncle, you can get the full good of your own vittles," Henry said.

"That's right," said Ned. "Seems like I didn't relish no kaikai when I had to gum it down."

"We all know what a cook Uncle is," said Monsieur Largeteau. "Come on to the teeth. Where'd he find 'em? In Naumia lagoon?"

"That's jes' about where I did find 'em, Mist' Largeteau, but you ain't gon' know nothing about it if you keep p'ch'in' us on too fas'. We ain't even finished supper yet."

"We'll call it finished," Henry went on, "and now we're stretched out on the beach under the puketea trees that's been growin' there from heathen times, I reckon. We brought our mats ashore, and after Ned's supper all we was fit for was lyin' there, digestin' it. It was full moon that night, and you can't beat Naumia for a pretty place on a night of full moon."

"Pretty soon Joe and Ned and the boys was snorin' away peaceful as anything. I was just ready to drop off when I heard a faint hummin' miles and miles away. I'd never heard an airship before, but I knew that's what it was because it couldn't have been anything else. And then, here she come; it wasn't two minutes till I saw her pass right across the moon. That was somethin' to see for the first time. It looked awful to me—awful big and awful fast, and she was miles away in half-a-minute. But she wasn't gone for good. Naumia's twenty miles around and the airship made the full

circle lookin' things over before she come down. The next time she passed over us she wasn't more'n two hundred feet over the tree-tops. That woke up Joe and the boys, and you've never seen anyone as scared as Ned was."

"I sho' was, Henry. If I'da had my teeth then they'd ha' been clackin' together makin' more racket than the engines did."



HENRY went on: "The main island is a good eight miles long, and the airship came down at the far end, a good five miles from where we was. She was all lit up and we could see her plain. She had a kind of headlight to come down with. We was all scared, far as that goes. The Huns had took France. We thought more'n likely they was comin' now to get what colonies there was left to take."

Henry broke off and was silent for so long that Nick prodded him with, "And then, what?"

"Joe, you tell 'em," said Henry. "I've lost my breath just thinkin' about how I lost it that night."

"We was too far off to see real good," said Joe, "but it was the lights that had us beat. Not all at once; it was kind of gradual, but we hadn't been watchin' two hours till they was all strung out through the groves and along that stretch of beach. You might have thought it was Papete waterfront the way it was at night before the war started."

"Every bit as light as that, Mist' McGoogin," Ned put in. "They was more, even."

"All that out of one plane?" Mr. Largeteau asked.

"I forgot to tell you," Henry said. "There was three more big flyin' ships came down inside half-an-hour after the first one. There was nothin' we could do but wait and see what next. Then, along about three o'clock in the morning a little motor launch came down the lagoon toward us. They must have spotted the Mama Tu lyin' in the cove. We took to the bush, the lot of us, but hid so's we could see out."

"An' when we heard 'em talkin' English I got right down on my knees an' said, 'Praise the Lord!'" Ned put in.

"You was there already, Ned," said Henry. "His legs wouldn't hold him up," he added.

"There was three officers in the launch beside the colonel. You wouldn't have thought he was a colonel, he was that friendly and easy to talk with. He says, 'Boy's, how are you? Where's the town?' 'Town?' says Joe. "There ain't no town here; nobody except us."

"That's funny," the colonel says. 'Ought to be a town here. You're sure there ain't one?' 'Dead sure,' says Joe. The colonel turned to one of the officers with him. 'Major,' he says, 'do you suppose some idiot of an S.O.B. in Washington has got our orders bollixed up?' 'That's my guess,' the major says. 'Wouldn't

be the first time it's happened.' 'Well,' says the colonel, 'we've come where we was told to come, and we're goin' to do what we was told to do when we got here. If there's been a mistake it's no funeral of ours.'

"Would you like a bite to eat?" I says, and they was all for it; so Ned got busy and in no time at all he had a supper ready for them as good as the one we'd had. You should have seen the way they tucked in!

"We showed 'em around that end of the island and when they'd seen it all the colonel says, 'Major, we picked the right place, the far end of the island,' and the major said he thought so too. They looked beat for sleep and we offered 'em our mats and pillows if they wanted to take a nap, but the colonel said they had no time to sleep until they'd got everything shipshape, ashore.

"They stayed at our end of the island, lookin' things over, till around nine o'clock in the morning; then they went back to where the airships was, and they took Joe and Ned and me with 'em. That little launch was something. It did a good fifteen knots."

"How'd they bring the launch?" Monsieur Largeteau asked. "Did it have wings, too?"

"You might have thought so, the way it flew down the lagoon," said Henry. "It did a good eighteen knots. No, sir. It came right out of one of the airships. And that ain't all that came out."



HENRY fell silent again, but at last he said, "Joe, what's the good of tellin' 'em? They won't believe it."

"Go ahead, anyway," said Joe. "We know what happened. And

they're drinkin' the whisky, ain't they? If that and Ned's teeth don't prove it, I don't know what would."

"When we got to where the airships landed there was a town built," Henry said, impressively. "The colonel'd told us there should have been a town on Naumia. Since there wasn't, they built one of their own."

"Overnight, I suppose?" said Monsieur Largeteau.

"It wasn't finished yet, Mist' Largeteau, but she was goin' up fast. All them pretty little round houses . . . how'd they call 'em, Henry? 'What's-it huts?'"

"Something like that," said Henry. "The officers' mess and the hospital was the first ones finished, but the colonel seemed to think there ought to be more of 'em ready by that time. The officers mess was wide as this veranda. There was a kind of lounge at one end, with tables and easy chairs and shelves full of books along the wall. The other half was little bedrooms on both sides of a hallway, for the officers."

"Don't forget the kitchen, Henry." Ned shook his head, wonderingly. "Lectric stove, big lectric ice-box, pots an' pans, bran' new, hangin' on the walls, shelves full o' canned goods, an' mess cooks gettin' dinner ready—beefsteaks an' pork chops an' I don't know what all!"

"Then the colonel took us to see the hospital," Joe put in. "That was all ready for anybody that was sick, beds made and everything neat an' tidy. There was an operatin' room at one end and a dentist office at the other. The dentist with his white coat an' apron was standin' by the door as we went by, waitin' for business."

"The colonel stopped dead when he saw him. 'Lieutenant,' he says, 'if you ain't busy, what about a nice set o' store teeth for Uncle, here? Guess he could do with 'em.' That was O.K. with the dentist. He took Ned right into his office and measured him for 'em."

"While Ned was in there," said Henry, "Joe an' me went with the colonel to see the rest of the town. Houses for the enlisted men was goin' up everywhere. They set 'em every which-way amongst the trees so's they wouldn't have to cut down any of the coconut palms. A lot of soldiers was to come in a few days, the colonel told us. Everything had to be ready by the time they got there."



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"How many came by the planes?" Monsieur Largeteau asked.

"What would you say, Joe?"

"Around a hundred. They called 'em Seabees. I never saw their beat for fast work. The whole town was finished by sundown that same evenin'. An' after supper we all went to the picture show."

"Picture show?" said Nick.

"That's right," said Henry. "It was a story about Frisco in the old days before the earthquake, an' it sure took Joe an' me back. But right in the middle of it an orderly came in with a wireless message for the colonel. As soon as he'd read it he went right out. We knew somethin' was up by the way he tore out o' there."

"And what was it?" Monsieur Largeteau asked.

"We stayed to see the end of the show, and when we came out the colonel was standin' with the major by the wireless office. 'Nouméa—that's where we're supposed to be,' we heard him say. An' the compliments he paid to whoever it was that sent 'em to Naumia in the Tuamotus was somethin'. I've heard some pretty cussin' in my time but never anything to come up to the colonel's. He rushed off with the major an' that's the last we saw of either one."

"He said he'd send Joe an' Ned an' me in the launch back to where the *Mama Tu* lay, but it was no time to remind him o' that so we walked the five miles to the far end of the island. Ned was feelin' pretty glum about not gettin' his teeth."

"I sho' was, Henry, I sho' was. The lieutenant told me he'd have 'em all ready the next mawnin' but I knew I'd never get 'em now. If they'd come to the wrong island they'd be bustlin' off to the one they was supposed to go to. Wouldn't have time to bother 'bout nobody's teeth."

"We was good an' tired when we got back to the *Mama Tu*, bein' awake most o' the night before and rushin' around all day; so we turned in and slep' so good we didn't any of us wake up till the sun was two hours high. While we was havin' our coffee Joe says, 'Henry, it's about time we was goin' on north to Fakarava. We'll stop on our way to the pass to say good-bye to the colonel.' So the boys got the hook up an' we ghosted down the lagoon. The breeze was no more than a whisper. We moved, but that was all."

"It was quiet as anything. We was five miles off, but we expected to hear some kind of stir and bustle from where their town was, but there wasn't a sound except the nuzzlin' of the sea along the outer reef. We couldn't figure it out. The air was hazy an' we couldn't see good at first, an' when finally we could, there was nothin' to see."



NICK asked, "What do you mean, it or not, they was gone. Joe and Ned an' me stared ahead, an' looked nothing to see?"

"They was gone, Nick. Believe the captain said. 'We brought the old tub into the cove where the airships was layin' the day before. There's deep water right alongside the beach and we stepped ashore still not sayin' a word, we was that dazed. But when you come to think of how quick they built their town it stands to reason they could take it down just as quick. Footprints was all they left behind 'em. You might ha' thought there'd be mess an' rubbish scattered around, but there wasn't. The sand was that clean as if they'd swept it before they pulled out. The only thing we found was a package of chewin' gum one of the Seabees must ha' dropped. Henry picked it up an' handed it to Ned. 'Uncle,' he says, 'try your gums on that.'"

"And that's the truest thing you've said yet . . ."

"Now wait a minute, Nick! Wait a minute!" the captain said. "We brought the old tub into the cove where the airships was layin' the day before. There's deep water right alongside the beach and we stepped ashore still not sayin' a word, we was that dazed. But when you come to think of how quick they built their town it stands to reason they could take it down just as quick. Footprints was all they left behind 'em. You might ha' thought there'd be mess an' rubbish scattered around, but there wasn't. The sand was that clean as if they'd swept it before they pulled out. The only thing we found was a package of chewin' gum one of the Seabees must ha' dropped. Henry picked it up an' handed it to Ned. 'Uncle,' he says, 'try your gums on that.'"

"But I didn't have to, Mist' McGoggin," the old man broke in, eagerly. "As we was walkin' up the beach—"

"Hold on, Ned! We ain't there yet," said Henry. "We went across the island first, remember? to where they'd set up the water-tanks an' distillin' plant. The day before there was fresh water comin' right out o' the sea through two-and-a-half-inch pipe. We couldn't believe it till we'd tasted it. It was gettin' pretty hot by this time, an' Joe says, 'Wish I had a swig of it right now,' but there was nothin' but the marks on the sand to show where the tanks had set. Then, as we was comin' back to the *Mama Tu* we found a package wrapped up in brown paper lyin' on the sand right where the officers' mess had been. There was a note tucked under the string. Tell 'em what it said, Joe."

"It wasn't signed, but it was addressed to me. It said: 'Dear Captain Chesebourn: Sorry we had to pull out in such a hurry. Enclosed you will find a little gift from Uncle Sam and the U. S. Army.'"

"Joe opened the package and inside was three bottles of whiskey, two boxes of cigars, an' a little box marked, 'For Uncle.' That was Ned's teeth settin' in a little nest o' cotton."

The brilliance of Uncle Ned's corroborating grin was softened by the haze of cigar smoke that hung in the still air. Joe took up the bottle and held it against the light.

"Fetch some more ice, Jules," he said. "There's enough left here for another round."

KILLERS LOVE GUNS

By

MICHAEL OBLINGER



ILLUSTRATED BY GERALD MCCANN

HE sure was a spooky cuss. Sheriff Gart Gordon sat lank and loose, interested in spite of himself, yet sore as a boil at Monty Rue for suggesting coming here, of all places, to get a lead on a slug-crazy hombre who had just massacred two ranchers, Stead and Martin, a drunken cowpoke named Bun O'Brien, and a sober bartender, Gypsy Halligan, in the Pin Point Saloon at Toiling Tree, Arizona.

This crazy critter, Si Crocker, that Gordon had come to see on Monty Rue's tip, walked up and down a square box room, smoking cornsilk cigarettes, talking out of the slack side of a big mouth, long thin bare feet going flap—flap—flap over the rough floor every step he took. He had a curious shaped head, a crooked nose, a wobbly chin and the strangest pair of eyes Gart had ever seen. One held the warm blue friendliness of an Arizona sky, and the other the cold blue of chilled steel. The bad eye gave the impression it was about ready to jump over on its mate and stab it to death with one of its mean, nasty looks.

Crocker walked and talked. His lingo was a queer mixture of comment, cussing, sudden pauses and galloping words.

"Yes, sir. So four men was kilt? Yuh're lookin' fer the killer? But bless me, ain't it hot! But lemme tell yuh, Sheriff, las' August was a

The other tried to draw first, but Gart's gun leaped and spurted.

dang sight wuss'n this. You could grow a crop o' sweat in yore whiskers jes' lyin' still in the shade o' the house. What kinda gun this killer use?"

"Forty-five Colt."

Crocker whirled as if that gun had just shot him.

"Colt!" he gabbled.

"Yeh, what's so queer about that?"

"Nothin'. Nothin', Sheriff. I gotta think. That's all—think. Now don't yuh get provoked at me. Yuh say—"

Gart's hand slid down on the butt of his own revolver. Two pairs of eyes, wild-looking, suspicious, had begun to shine among the littered confusion at the far end of the room. He nodded toward them and snapped at Crocker, "Are those cats?"

"No," Crocker answered. "Brats."

"Huh!"

"My sister's brats I brung over from Shady Rock. Lookin' after 'em while she's sick. Stand up, Crocus—stand up, Salabra, yuh dog-brisled little scoots."



THEY stood up while Gart swallowed and stared and wanted to laugh, but couldn't. Salabra was a girl, apparently, of about eight or ten, and Crocus, the boy, looked to be a hundred or more in a pint-sized pattern, his face lined like an elder's and his expression all grown-up. Crocus had one dirty little paw around the sawed-off barrel of a shotgun, the real thing, and Salabra—lacking a more suitable weapon—was pointing the handle of a broom at Gart.

"Cute, ain't they?" Crocker drawled.

"Yeah," Gart acknowledged doubtfully. "What were they planning to do—bushwhack me?"

While Crocker sat down to yank a large splinter out of the blackened sole of one bare foot, Gart stared curiously around the room. Stove, table, a few chairs, cupboard for dishes, bunks. Except for the walls, the rest was dirt and litter. But the walls, painted the color of dried blood, were impressive. They were decorated with guns, traps, pelts of animals, mounted heads. Hanging above a picture of Custer's Last Stand, was a dark weazened-looking trophy Gart took to be an Indian's scalp. Crocker must love guns. In the space of a few seconds, the sheriff counted fourteen.

Crocker looked over at Gart. "Where was them four murders pulled off—in the Pin Point Saloon?"

"Yes."

Crocker examined the splinter, holding it up to the light. "Too bad, ain't it?"

"Someone said the killer rode a bob-tailed bay," Gart informed him. "Also the bay had one slit ear."

Hurriedly Crocker dropped the splinter in the woodbox behind him. He wiggled the big toe of his injured foot. "Sheriff," he said eagerly, "kin yuh give me some notion what the description of the killer be? Hot, ain't it? Take off yore coat, Sheriff. Would yuh like another chair to hold up yore heels?"

Gart grinned. "No, thanks," he said. "No one had a good look at the killer, Mr. Crocker, so I can't help you there."

Crocker's expression was one of relief. He bent down to examine his other foot. Gart wanted to snicker. This visit was Monty's idea and right now it looked like it didn't have an icicle's chance in Hades to get him anywhere. Unless Crocker had seen a suspicious looking character ride past here within the last few hours, there would be little he could add to the limited stock of knowledge about where the killer might have gone. Monty had said the killer would be sure to come this way because, beyond Crocker's, the country's rugged terrain offered places galore a hunted man could hide in.

"How does Crocker make his living?" Gart had asked.

"Shootin' mountain lions an' wolves to collect the bounty, runnin' down strays fer ranchers an' sich odd chores."

Crocker's voice broke into the sheriff's private session with himself, rumbling like a landslide of rocks down a steep hill: "What the maverick start shootin' fer? Kin yuh tell me that, Sheriff?"

"Nobody knows," Gart answered. Then he went on to explain more in detail, "It happened at around noon. Stead and Martin and O'Brien and the killer were the only customers in the Pin Point Saloon. Monty Rue, the storekeeper next door, heard shots. He ran out on the walk, he says, just in time to see a man come out of the saloon and head back toward the alley, toting guns. Then he lost sight of him. A feller named Jeff Barry happened to be near one end of the alley. He testified seeing a man mount a bay, its tail bobbed, one ear slit, and scoot off like hell was after him. Meanwhile, Monty goes into the saloon and finds the bodies. Bun O'Brien, who's been on a bender for the last two weeks, was the only one not quite dead—but too close to dead to talk. Gypsy Halligan, a swell bartender—he never took a drink—was sprawled behind the bar, three bullets in him. Shot in the head. All the others were two slugs apiece in their hearts and chests. Monty brought me the news and I went over to investigate. Then I came here."

Crocker's bad eye gave the sheriff a terrific tussle before it returned to a murderous inspection of its owner's feet.

"Why'd yuh come here?"

Gart lied, "Figured the outlaw was headed this way, Mr. Crocker."



THE bounty hunter rose, went over and took the broom away from the girl, removed the shells from one of the two Colt .45's slung to his belt, then casually handed her the empty weapon.

"Now don't go an' shoot yore head off," he cautioned her. "Jes' take a bead on the gen'em-an, Salabra—an' pop it to him."

"Nice little game," the sheriff observed dryly. Crocker leered at him, nodding. "Smart little scoots, ain't they? Crocus kin tear the tail feathers offen a hen at twenty yards."

Gart sniffed. "He'll be tearing yours off too, one of these days. Now listen, Mr. Crocker—I'm anxious to find that killer. Did anyone pass by here about—"

He paused, startled. Crocker had taken the gun from the boy, and now broke the breech, extracting two loaded shells. A light mist sprinkled the sheriff's face. That kid had not blown his head off, by the grace of God, but he'd come perilously close to it. Gart steadied his hands on his knees. Then he got mad.

"Take those blasted shooting irons away from both of them," he commanded harshly. "Enough of that. Dammit, Crocker, they'll kill somebody sure. You ought to know better."

"O.K.," Crocker said in a low, patient voice. He put the shotgun up on two pegs, the Colt back in its holster.

"Better. Now did you see anyone—"

"Not the killer."

"How do you know?"

The children began to cry. Crocker slapped across the floor toward Gart. "They was two of 'em—Jim Peavy an' Bud Pierce. Puttin' up hay over by the Injun reserve. Say, ain't it hot? Them boys wouldn't kill nobody an' they ain't got a bob-tailed hoss."

Furious over the loss of his weapon, Crocus sat down solidly on the floor and yelled. Salabra sat down on some empty grain sacks and yelled. Gart tried to yell to make himself heard.

Crocker put his mouth up close to the sheriff's ear and panted, "Now, see what yuh done! They get ornery without nothin' to amuse themselves. What's wrong iffen the weapons ain't loaded?"

"Oh, hell!" Gart said. "Hell, yes, let 'em have 'em. Maybe I ought to turn my guns over to 'em too. We mustn't spoil their fun."

His heavy sarcasm fell unheard on Crocker's retreating back. The yells and yelps subsided. Salabra patted the six-shooter in her lap. Crocus rose gleefully to his knees and got another bead on Gart.

Midway of the room, the sheriff looked over at Crocker and sneered, "Cute, ain't they?"

"Yep," Crocker grinned.

It was a curious lop-sided grin. He came back to where Gart was now standing and

there was a haunted expression in his one good eye.

He said, "A bob-tail bay with a slit ear, huh?"

"Yes."

"The feller din't see the brand on thet hoss?"

"No."

"An' yore positive about the .45 Colt slugs in them four bodies?"

"Yes."

"Loisa .45 Colts around here," Crocker observed.

"Sure."

"Guess I can't help yuh no more, Sheriff," Crocker said shakily. "Yuh'll be a-wantin' tuh hit the trail, I s'pose."

Gart glanced at the haunted eye, at the mouth—tight at one corner, slack at the other. Then he noticed something else. Crocker's red beard was crawling up toward his high cheekbones, then sliding back again. Not a muscle in his face was quiet. Even his nose twitched.

Suddenly Gart had one of those peculiar flashes. It startled him.

"Crocker, before I go," he said, "let's take a walk back to your barn."

"Barn!" Crocker moaned.

"Stick on your boots, man," Gart said sharply, "and come with me."



TWO horsemen turned off the trail and cantered toward them as they stepped out on the screened porch. At a distance, Gart recognized both of them. One was Monty Rue, storekeeper at Toiling Tree, and the other was Jeff Barry who had testified seeing a man run into the alley right after the shooting, mount the bob-tailed bay and ride furiously away. Gart descended the broken steps from the porch, gray eyes glinting questioningly. Must be something new had developed since he'd ridden out of town. The boys had come after him, bringing the news.

Gart said to Crocker who was standing tall and ungainly at his side in a pair of oversized cowhide boots, "Let's see what these fellers want."

In the lead, Monty dropped off his dripping sorrel, a little runt of a horse, whistled out a greeting between two broken front teeth and stalked over. Jeff Barry followed a few paces behind. They had evidently ridden hard. Lather showed on the glistening black satiny neck of Barry's horse and both critters were blowing.

"Well?" Gart said.

Monty Rue yanked out his handkerchief and mopped his short, narrow face. His ears were too large for his face and the nose too small. His chin was a tiny knob sticking up insolently just below his thin mouth.

"Gart," he announced eagerly, "we found out what that blasted killer done all that shootin' fer."

Barry, a handsome, strapping six feet of bone and brawn, had slouched lazily over behind Rue. Now he contributed, "You bet, we found out, Sheriff. Monty figured we'd better tail out here fast an' let you know about it. We—"

Monty's voice, heavy for a small man's, drowned out Barry's, "Right after you left, Gart, Stead's missus showed up in town. She was all broke up natchelly an' fainted when she seen the body. After we brought her to, she told us Stead an' Martin allers toted a thick bale o' wampus fer emergencies' sake. Sometimes as much as ten thousand dollars apiece. They played a lot of poker."

Barry stuck his head over Monty's thin shoulder until his handsome mug was close to Gart's.

"All you found on 'em was some loose change an' a couple wadded bills. Ain't that true?"

"Yes."

"Well, their purses was took off them by the killer. That's sure."

Gart sat down on a shaggy stump to think. Crocker backed out of the sun into the shadow of the porch. He hadn't lied about the heat. It was hotter than a frying griddle cake. Around them air rippled in glistening sheets. Beyond the trail, low hills humped their grass-dried shoulders into a quivering, distorted horizon.

Jeff Barry swallowed the dust in his throat. He licked his lips. "Mr. Crocker, yuh mind if I go in the house fer a drink o' water? I'm so danged thirsty I can't even spit."

"Help yoreself," Crocker said obligingly. "Pail an' dipper next to the sink."

Barry went in, came out, then Gart stood up, motioned to Crocker and they went around the house, followed by Rue and Barry. The barn, less than eighty yards behind the house, was small and dumpy with two paneless windows in front and a door that sagged on loosened hinges. A manure pile and a rick of hay stood at opposite sides of the building. A one-horse buggy with broken dashboard and two shattered wheels was trying to hide its neglect and shame in a patch of tall weeds just a little beyond the manure pile.

Gart turned his head to glance at Crocker as he strode up to the open door. Crocker had hands clasped together in front of him and the knucklebones were white. His good eye was panicky; the bad one jerked in its socket as if it was trying to escape. The slack corner of his mouth made a strange twittering noise.

Gart stopped. "You go in ahead of me," he said.

Gart followed Crocker in. Behind him, Rue and Barry made a dark block of shadow almost cutting off the light.

Crocker's voice faltered; it was faintly apologetic. "Only got one hoss, Sheriff."

A bobbed tail and slit ear leaped into Gart's consciousness before the completed picture of

the rest of the critter had a chance to register. Then he saw it was a bay, all right—a middling sized bay horse with stalky legs and traces of spavin. Bluebottle flies had blown eggs over its rump. The sweat-dried pattern over the horse's back showed where a saddle blanket had recently lain.



FROM the doorway came a short, quick exclamation from Barry. Monty Rue stepped in beside Gart. "I'll be double damned!" he cried.

Gart looked at Crocker. The bounty-hunter's face now held the stillness and blankness and dryness of a desert. The red beard resembled heaps of sand. The eyes were sunken, deserted waterholes. The nose was a bleak limestone crag.

"That's the hoss the killer escaped on," Barry suddenly yelled. "I seen it—yes, sir, it was the one I seen in the alley today."

"I had it tied in the alley," Crocker admitted unexpectedly. "Is that wrong? Whew—but it's close in here! Ever' week I go to the Toiling Tree courthouse to collect my bounty. An' ever' time I hitch this yer hoss in the alley."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Gart asked.

Crocker shrugged. "Yuh didn't ast me, Sheriff."

"No, you didn't ask him," Monty sneered. "Gart, there's the saddle with two saddle-guns. Mebbe yuh ought to examine them guns."

Gart did. Colt six-guns, .45's—three cartridges not yet exploded. Three subtracted from twelve left nine shots. And the killer had fired nine shots—three into the bartender and two each into the others.

Gart confronted Crocker. "How are you going to explain this?" he demanded.

"So help me, I can't."

"Yuh better put the irons on him right away, Sheriff," Barry said.

Gart swung toward Barry and his eyes were hot. "When I need instructions, I'll ask for them," he said. "Come on, all of you, we'll go back into the house." On the way there, he asked, "Crocker, what time did you ride out of that alley at Toiling Tree and start for home?"

"I ain't got no watch," Crocker answered meekly, "but the sun said twelve o'clock or a little later mebbe."

"What did I tell yuh!" Monty gloated. "It all fits in, Sheriff. Now all we need is tuh find the money he's hid somewhere. Me an' Barry'll pitch in an' help yuh." He paused and added, "If yuh don't mind."

"I don't mind," Gart said. "We'll start in the house."

Walking ahead of Gart, Crocker turned and there was fury, murdering fury, in his one bad eye. "Yuh kin all go to hell," he declared savagely. "I didn't do it. Hear me—damn yuh! It wa'n't me."

"We hear you," Gart said.

"Never was a killer yet what didn't deny his guilt," Monty commented sagely.

They all went into the house. Crocker sat down and tugged off his boots. At the far end of the room, Crocus and Salabra had dwindled away to a pair of suspicious eyes. Monty unbuttoned two more buttons of his open shirt and rolled up his sleeves. Barry dashed some sweat from his forehead. Gart went over to the water pail and helped himself to a drink. As he did so, he glanced into a small, cheap mirror hanging above the drainboard, next to the sink. Rue and Barry were staring curiously at the decorated walls.

"Jes' looks all them guns!" Barry exclaimed. "He shore loved his guns."

"Is that wrong?" Crocker asked.

The search began. Rue and Barry tapped their feet over the floor, found a loose board and pulled it up. There was nothing under it except dirt and the dirt hadn't been disturbed. Replacing the board, they searched shelves, boxes, the cupboard; looked inside two kettles hanging over the kitchen stove; tore the blankets off Crocker's bunk and examined the mattress; looked through the children's bed, looked under the bed, looked behind a gilt-framed picture of Paul Revere's ride.

Gart sat on a chair, lighted his pipe and watched them. Monty paused presently, glowered, and asked, "Ain't yuh gonna help us, Sheriff?"

Gart took the pipe out of his mouth and blew two lazy smoke rings into the air.

"When you get through, I'll start in," he said.



OUT of the corner of one eye he was watching Crocker living through hell. From the corner of the other one, he had Crocus and Salabra under inspection too. They were both peering into a small cardboard box from which the boy had just lifted off the cover.

Abruptly Crocker moaned, "Yuh won't find nothin' here, I tell yuh. I didn't shoot nobody. I didn't steal nothin'."

Young Barry laughed. It was a cold, harsh laugh, strange-sounding in that sweltering room. Barry didn't look so handsome when he laughed like that, Gart reflected.

Barry said, "No, o' course, yuh didn't."

"Mebbe he hid the stuff outside," Rue said and walked over and helped himself to a drink. He drank greedily, choked, dropped the dipper back into the pail. He straightened and turned toward Barry. "Yuh look inside this sink yet?"

"No."

Monty stooped and yanked open a small door, thrust one arm in, then jumped back howling, holding two leather purses in his hand.

"By God, I've found them," he said.

"Holy Hell!" Barry yelled.

Monty handed the purses to Gart. In his excitement and wonder, Gart dropped his pipe. Crocker let out a smothered shriek and leaped toward the door. Gart dived forward from a sitting position on his chair and brought Crocker down, crashing and squirming. Monty and Barry held him there, on the floor, while Gart put the irons on him.

"Behave yourself," he said. "You wouldn't run out on Crocus and Salabra."

Crocker sat up and wept. Gart wouldn't look at him. He went back to his chair, picked up the two purses from the floor and stood while he examined each one carefully. There was no money in either of the purses but one had Stead's name lettered on it and the other contained a receipted bill made out to Jim Martin.

Gart looked at Monty. "Theirs, all right."

Monty blinked. "Crocker musta hid the money somewheres else."

Arms behind his back, handcuffs rattling, Crocker limped over and stood looking down at the boy and girl—biting on his lower lip and quietly snuffling. Gart stuffed the purses in his pocket. He swung suddenly toward Rue and Barry. "I'll take your guns now," he said pleasantly. "You fellers ain't quite as smart as you think you are. It's you two, not Crocker, I want. Both of you."

Barry tried to draw first but Gart's gun leaped and spurted. Monty fired from his hip. Barry and Gart went down six feet from each other, one in a limp dead heap, the other clutching his side. Heat waves, or something that resembled them—jumpy, shivery, filled the room. Gart tried to get his gun around in time to stop Monty. But right at the door a terrific blast swept Monty along sideways and he staggered and fell against the wall. Gart scrambled up, shook his head, weaved over and pointed his gun at Monty.

He called over his shoulder, "Crocus, if you shoot again, I'll tan your hide good. Crocker, watch that boy!"

Stooping, Gart snapped the weapon out of Monty's right hand. He said, "We'll fix up your legs as well as we can. But the doc in town'll have to probe out the bird shot."

"Fer Gawd's sake, help me over to the bunk!" Monty screamed.

Gart got a pillow and placed it under Monty's head. Next he removed Crocker's handcuffs. The bounty-hunter stared at the blood on Gart's shirt. "Yore bad hurt, Sheriff."

"I'm all right. Only a flesh wound." He scowled at Crocker. "You got panicky and tried to escape," he said. "I knew you were innocent. The whole dang business was too cut an' dried. And a lot of things were wrong about that frame-up. They overshot their mark. For example, why would you tie your horse in the alley, take your two saddle-guns into the bar to

(Continued on page 145)



SPITE CORNER

THE two boys left the bar and took their drinks to a corner table. They could not get over the wonder of it—meeting thus on Fifty-first Street, in New York, and meeting as strangers—although they had been brought up on farms less than five hundred meters apart, in a mountain village of the French Jura.

"I thought you looked familiar," said Marc Vandrel, the younger, twenty years old at the most. "Yes, I thought, here's a guy with a map just like the Coulons have, same chin, same ears . . ." He gestured, indicated the crowded length of the bar, the bottles behind, the signs in French and English. "Caught sight of you in the mirror and I thought I was dreaming, until I saw your uniform and thought that if I was here, why shouldn't you be?"

"You thought: There's a dirty Coulon mug, that's what you thought," Raoul Coulon said, with a grin. He wore the uniform of the French Navy, the braid of petty officer. Not as tall as Marc, he was heavier, three years older.

They exchanged stories. Marc's tale was simple. He had lived home through the German Occupation, enlisted in the Air Corps after Liberation. He had been sent to the United States as an aviation cadet. This was his first leave in New York, but some French people down south had given him the address of friends in town. Nice people, too; Raoul must come to have dinner with them.

Coulon had been in the regular Navy. He had been in Morocco when the Americans had come. He had seen action here and there. Yes, he had heard from home, his mother had written him long letters with all the village news for the past two and a half years, pages and pages.

"Bet she didn't mention I was in America," Marc said.

For two seconds, they stared at each other solemnly, then both broke into laughter. They ordered drinks, clicked glasses, and tried to speak of casual subjects, but it was no use—when their eyes met, they laughed.

"If our folks could see us—" Coulon said.

"Yes, a Coulon and a Vandrel drinking together!"

They laughed, touched glasses and drank.

"Rather funny, eh?" Coulon said.

"Rather!" Marc agreed. "You know, I never thought about it since leaving, but now that I see you and do think of it, it seems pretty small."

His tanned but boyish face lighted up. "Compared with the war, and crossing the Atlantic Ocean! That sort of shrank things up, that ocean crossing—makes that bit of grass and the three apple trees seem like a joke—"

"Same here," Raoul nodded, "and more of it—I've crossed the Indian Ocean, the Pacific. I want to go home, of course, and I've been homesick plenty, but things back there do seem

small. You can't imagine people fighting over a few square meters of land, can you?"

"When did it start, anyway?"

"Well, it was going on when my grandfather was a kid, and he's almost seventy-nine. If we could remember when the railroad was put through—that's what started it, you know—"

"Say between 1875 and 1880," Marc figured. He drank, smiled. "More than sixty years, anyway, and our families haven't been speaking—kids fighting in school, grown-ups glaring even at church—all for nothing."



THE two talked of their travels, of girls and liquors, of planes and naval actions. But every few minutes, the same subject popped up again and they would resume laughing. It was a very old village quarrel, the case of the three apple trees: When the railroad had been built into the mountains, the tracks had gone across both the Vandrel and the Coulon farms, forming a dividing line for some distance. It chanced that a small triangle of land sold by the Vandrels, perhaps twenty-five square meters, just large enough to hold three apple trees, had been isolated on the Coulon side, and the Coulons had fenced it in with an orchard of theirs. This had gone unnoticed for two years, then the Vandrels not only claimed the land but asked for rental on the space. The Coulons contended that they had made a verbal arrangement with the railway to get that bit in exchange for space elsewhere.

Marc's great-grandfather had gone to law, there had been one of those long farmers' quarrels, with renewed suits, trials, which had cost many times the value of the lot. But there was a point of pride and a principle involved. Mostly, the courts had upheld the Coulons, but there had been reversed decisions. Every autumn, there was a fresh row, for the Vandrels tried to sneak in and pick the apples from the trees. Sometimes, the strife grew so bitter that the bigger orchards were neglected.

Seen from New York, at a distance of several thousand miles, the whole matter seemed unimportant, stupid, laughable. But both boys knew it was a serious matter back home and that their friendship would not be smiled upon. No Vandrel had spoken politely to a Coulon since the first trial!

"Know what we'll do?" Marc suggested. "We'll try to get home at the same time. Then we'll walk into the Inn together. What the devil, old man, we're not living in 1880! It's time to stop!"

"Sure," Coulon agreed. "It's idiotic, that's what. We always have to be on opposite sides in everything because of that patch of land, even in politics. It's time to stop! For me, it will be easy enough," he added, "because I am

the oldest boy and I'll get our farm when I leave the service. For you—"

"I'm the oldest, too," Marc said slowly. "My brother—well, he came back from Germany in '42 and died seven months after."

Coulon struck the table with his palm.

"There's a sample—mama wrote me about everybody, but she never mentioned that, just because he was of your bunch! Shows you how crass and stupid they can be—even death doesn't count—and your brother was my age, a nice guy, everybody said, and we should have been friends—"

"We'll settle that, once and for all," stated Marc.

"You bet we will." They shook hands. "Let's have a drink on it. We'll talk right up and tell them all—"

They had another drink and another. They abandoned all pretense, they discussed the matter of the lot and the three apple trees, listed the quarrels, the trials, the expenses, the yearly battles. Meeting here, on neutral soil, made the foolishness of it stand out sickeningly.

"I'll tell you what," Marc proclaimed. "The two of us will be friends, no matter what they say. And as soon as I inherit the farm, I'll go before a notary and have a deed drawn up giving you that lot and the trees in full and complete grant—"

Coulon was about to drink, held the glass poised. "A deed?"

"That's what—from person to person, you know, a 'grant'—"

The petty officer laid the glass down carefully.

"And just how can you do that," he asked soberly, "seeing that they're our property already . . . ?"

"It's a shame," the owner's wife said fifteen minutes later, sniffing and wiping her eyes. "I don't know what got into them! They'd both been in here before and quieter boys you couldn't ask for. And tonight, they were so happy to see each other, it sounded like they knew each other from home, and they started to drink together, all friendly. No, it wasn't about a girl, they didn't so much as look at the girls!"

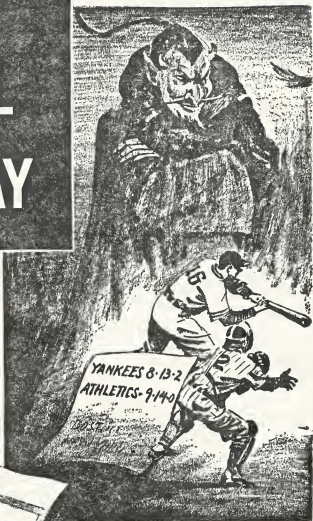
"Then, first thing you know, they're fighting. They break a lot of stuff which I wouldn't ask them to pay, seeing they're French boys and in military service. But my husband gets a sprained wrist and a cut lip separating them, then they won't shake hands and be friends. After that, the big one waits outside and starts all over again, and the cop has to stop them."

"Neither one can speak good English, and the cop calls me out to explain. But when I tell him that as near as I can make out they're fighting about some apples, the cop gets sore and asks me what am I trying to do, kid him, and what sort of a dive are we running in here!"

THE DEVIL TO PAY

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOSEPH FARREN

Every day the Devil came through with a good thing—horse-races, baseball, prize-fights. Within a month, I had more than four hundred grand.



WELL, there's nothing to do now but sit here and wait. I'm scared, of course. But I keep thinking how the whole thing started and how crazy I was. And then I remember the old Spanish proverb: Man talks, but God does what he pleases. I guess that goes for the Devil, too.

It started with me pushing back my chair after an all-night poker session at the Blue Pencil Club. Daylight was slicing through the Venetian blinds and I watched where it fell in

A "Blue Pencil Club" Story

By FRANKLIN GREGORY



yellow bars on the polished floor. Then I was looking at the green baize cover of the poker table with its disarray of cards and chips and empty beer glasses and spilled ashtrays.

And then I was looking at Slugger McGonigle.

"Till tomorrow night then," McGonigle said.

"Oh sure," I replied. I tried to speak with airy assurance.

I knew, as I stood there, of course, that I should have stopped playing when I went broke

at midnight. Lord knows, Bill Murgatroyd tried hard enough to get me to go home. Bill's our baseball writer, and he and I were pals.

I'd heard of McGonigle when I was out on district. But I'd never met him before. He was a big guy, with the shoulders of a water buffalo and the thick, hairy arms of an ape. He'd been a prizefighter when he was a kid and his marred face showed it. He ran a gambling house down on the waterfront, and I guess this was sort of a busman's holiday for him. I

didn't know who'd brought him into our club, which was, after all, a hangout for fairly respectable newspapermen. But I did know I'd been losing steadily since he sat in and that he was the big winner.

I knew that. And, as I said, I knew I should have taken Bill's advice when I went broke. But McGonigle offered to carry me, and like a sap I let him. You know how it is—you lose one pot after another, and you keep thinking: The next one's mine sure.

Only it wasn't. The cards just weren't running my way. And here I was, four hundred slugs into McGonigle and I didn't have the ghost of an idea where I'd raise it.

"Down in our part of town," McGonigle said, "we always pay our little bills prompt. Health insurance, we call it."

"Oh sure," I said again. "You don't need to worry about a little dough like this, Mr. McGonigle."

"Me," said McGonigle with a smile I didn't like, "I never have to worry."

My throat felt dry. I knew what he meant by health insurance. I tried to look nonchalant as I walked out of the card room into the bar.

"Double rye," I told Joe. Joe's the steward.

"You working today?" Joe asked.

"Yeah, at noon."

Joe was in one of his paternalistic moods.

"You oughta get next to yourself, Tommy," he said. "Look—here you are, a nice bright boy like you with a fine war record and a college education and a good job. And you just got promoted to be a rewrite man and your boss likes you and gives you a raise, and so what? You stay up all night playin' poker with the likes of them." He jerked a thumb toward the card room. "How old are you, Tommy?"

"Twenty-eight," I said.

"Old enough to know better," Joe grumbled. "How much did you lose this time?"

I thought: They never ask how much I win.

"Well," I said, "I had forty-fifty bucks when I sat in. And now I'm into McGonigle for four hundred."

Joe whistled.

"Four hundred! Say—do you know who he is?"

"I know," I said. "Golly, I'd sell my soul to the Devil himself to get out of this jam."

"Don't say that, Tommy," Joe warned me. "The Devil might hear you. Here, have one on the house and then run along like a good boy and catch some shut-eye."



I WAS feeling plenty punk when I arrived in the city room at noon. I'd only had three hours' sleep, and my mouth felt like it had a wad of cotton in it. And I was plenty worried.

When I went up to my desk, I found some

jerk working over my typewriter. He wasn't the regular typewriter man. Yet there was something familiar about him. I stood beside the desk, watching him make an adjustment with a tiny screw driver. Then I said, "You going to take long?"

He glanced up. He didn't say anything. He neither nodded nor shook his head. He had a lean, long, ruddy face and thin lips and a long, hooked nose and rather sharp ears. His black hair was tufted in two places, just above each of his heavy black eyebrows, and his eyes were black and bright. Then he returned to his work, and I had the feeling again that I ought to know him.

I was beginning to get the jitters, so instead of hanging around the desk I walked out to the locker room where I always kept a bottle and took a stiff quickie. When I got back, the repairman was gone.

My first job every day was a colorless little column we called "Today in Town." It was boring as hell, but I had to get it out of the way before the more interesting stuff like murders and city hall scandals started coming through from the reporters. The column consisted merely of listing the various club meetings, conventions, special museum programs and such-like that would take place the next day. People sent the items in and we filed them. I got out the file and started to work.

I hadn't written two words when I discovered that the old mill was working like a sweetheart. I'd never known a typewriter could work so easy.

In no time, I'd finished half the column.

I'm a pretty good typist. Not one of these hunt-and-peckers, you know. I use touch system. And so most of the time I don't even look at what I'm writing, but keep my eyes on the notes and only once in a while glance at the typewritten copy to check errors.

Well, I was doing like that when something funny happened. I'd just written:

2 P.M.—State Convention of Dental Surgeons, Town Hall.

And there, right under that line, I found:

Narragansett Results

First Race—Off, 2:17½, \$2500, clg, 4 yrs. up, 6 f. Devil May Care, 113 (Smith) \$56.40 \$25.80 \$11.50

I looked again.

There wasn't any mistake. Anybody who plays the horses would know at a glance, of course, that it meant that a pony named Devil May Care with a jockey called Smith in the saddle had scampered home in the first race at the Narragansett track to pay \$56.40 for a \$2 bet to win.

But I hadn't written those lines!

I went out to the locker room to think it over. Maybe it was a hallucination, I figured, and a drink would straighten it out. But when

I got back to my desk, it still read what I thought it had. I looked at it some more.

I follow the races a bit, but I didn't recognize this particular bangtail. I got up again and walked over to the back files and thumbed through the sports pages. But there wasn't any reference to the nag in the results from Narragansett, Pimlico or Jamaica, the three tracks that were operating just then.

Then I walked back into the sports department to see Bill Murgatroyd.

"Bill," I asked, "did you ever hear of a giddyap called Devil May Care?"

Bill didn't reply directly. Instead, he said, "Why'n hell didn't you go home last night like I told you?" I didn't have any answer for that, and he added: "They say you're into McGonigle for four hundred bucks. Where you going to get that kind of trumf?"

Well, of course I didn't have any answer for that one, so I simply repeated my question.

"Yes," Bill said. "There's an old beetle called Devil May Care that went lame a few weeks back. Owned by Frank Welch, and—" Bill picked up a copy of a racing guide. "He's entered in the first at Narragansett tomorrow afternoon. It's a claiming race for four-year-olds and up and they'll go six furlongs."

"Tomorrow afternoon?" I repeated faintly.

"Tomorrow afternoon," Bill said. "And if you're thinking of betting on this turtle, Tommy, you're a bigger chump than I thought you were."



I WENT back to my desk. There was something mighty peculiar about this, and I wanted to figure it out. I made all kinds of mistakes that afternoon—names, ages, addresses wrong. That sort of thing. And then every time I glanced at the clock, I nearly choked. For every time that minute hand jumped forward a notch I was that much closer to the time I'd have to settle with McGonigle.

I don't know when I began to see the light. It was after dinner some time. I guess it just sort of crept up on me. They say that guys who gamble a lot are naturally superstitious, and maybe that was it. I'd never been superstitious, exactly. But I never figured there was any use in taking chances, either.

Anyhow, it crept up on me that this message I got on the typewriter was nothing less than divine intervention. Heaven had seen what a jam I was in and had decided to do something about it. What else could it be? I hadn't written it.

When I decided that, I said to myself: Well, Tommy, all you have to do is bet a few bucks on Devil May Care, sit back and wait for the horse to do the rest.

Yeah—that was all. And me without two nickels to rub together. I started a tour of the office.

There were certain guys in that office I wouldn't borrow from if I were starving to

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death. Then there were other guys who were normally broke in the middle of the week like me. True, Bill Murgatroyd usually had a few loose guilders; but I hesitated to ask him in view of the way he felt about the horse.

I made a trip around the rim of the copy desk, mentioning that I knew an absolutely sure thing that would pay off at 28 to 1. But the reaction wasn't very satisfactory. Everybody was polite enough, but cool, if you know what I mean. And I couldn't very well explain why I was so sure of this sure thing. It's common enough, of course, for horse players to have their own individual systems for picking winners. But somehow I didn't think they would understand if I told them I had a system based on divine guidance. Some of the fellows aren't so very reverent.

The long and short of it was that I wasn't able to make a touch. And I was feeling pretty desperate when I happened to remember that I had an old war bond somewhere around the house—one of the eighteen-seventy-five kind. When I got home, I searched through my bureau drawers and finally located it. I took the bond down to the bank next morning, got twenty bucks for it, and then walked into the C. & B. cigar store near the *Herald* where Benny the Bookie did business.

Benny was always glad to see me, and no wonder. I guess I just about supported that guy for the last five years. And so he was only too glad to take my money on Devil May Care's puss to win. When he stuck it in his pocket, he had the gleam of a guy who just found a twenty-spot on the street.

I got my column out in less time than it takes to tell it. A few minutes after 2 o'clock I wandered into the wire room where the teletype was set up to report the results from Narragansett.

I didn't have long to wait. Holy Moses, the favorite, stumbled on the last turn, two horses piled on top of him, and Devil May Care won in a walk.

After work that night, I dropped in at the C. & B., collected \$560 from Benny, and then strolled down to Slugger McGonigle's joint on the waterfront.



I'D NEVER been there before, and I discovered it was quite a place: inch-thick oriental rugs, soft lights, paneled walls, mahogany furniture.

McGonigle greeted me like a long-lost son. I guess, for one thing, it's a nuisance to have to put the arm on people; and now, with me turning up so promptly, he wouldn't have to. For another thing, I guess for a guy in his position it pays to be nice. He led me into his private office, I handed over the four hundred, and he brought out a bottle. Then, after we'd sat around and gassed awhile,

he said, "Would you like to look the layout over?"

Well, I'm a gambling man and I guess it's just in my blood and there's nothing can be done about it. So I said, "Sure." We went out into the main room.

There was just about every game there you could think of, and some that you couldn't. You could see it wasn't any tinhorn joint. The dealers and croupiers were well dressed and quiet spoken. And nobody at the tables ever raised their voices.

Of course, I still had \$160 left and so when we passed the roulette table, I stopped for a little fling.

When I left two hours later, I not only had my original \$100, but another \$980 of McGonigle's dough. I was feeling pretty good, I'll say.

I felt even better when I stopped in at the Blue Pencil Club. The fellows had heard about me and my trouble with McGonigle, and then they'd heard how Devil May Care romped home. And they all gathered around me at the bar and pumped my hand and slapped me on the back.

And I told them how I'd just finished nicking McGonigle for another grand. And I bought for the house. We had quite a party.

It would have been a better party except for Murgatroyd.

"Join in," I called to him when I saw him standing down at the other end of the bar. He seemed sulky, and I couldn't figure out why.

Then he said, so everybody could hear: "Me drink with a guy who holds out on his pal?"

After that, he walked out of the room.

It jarred me. It's no fun having your best friend walk out on you. But you can't show a thing like that, so I turned back to the bar and picked up my drink. Joe, the steward, was beaming at me.

"Anyway, Tommy," he said, "you didn't have to sell your soul to the Devil."

"It was divine guidance," I said. And I started to down my drink.

Suddenly I choked. For all at once it came to me just who that typewriter repairman was. No wonder I'd had the feeling I ought to know him! He looked just like he did in the picture books when I was a kid.

"Don't you feel good?" asked Joe.

I saw myself in the mirror of the back bar. I was white as a sheet. My hand was shaking, and the whiskey was spilling out of the glass.

"Something I ate," I said. And I turned and left the club.



I DIDN'T sleep any too good that night. I kept thinking about that repairman. I remembered how well the typewriter had worked after he'd monkeyed with it. And there were other things, too: the sinister name of

that horse; the fact that the pay-off was predicted to the last cent. God! I still sweat when I think of it. For there wasn't a doubt, of course—the Devil had overheard that remark I made to Joe and had taken me up on it.

When I did fall asleep finally, I dreamt I was covering a general alarm fire, and the flames started lapping toward me and I started running but the flames kept coming faster and faster. And when I looked back over my shoulder I saw Slugger McGonigle's face laughing at me. And McGonigle had horns. I woke up sweating.

It was all I could do to drag myself to work the next noon. And when I sat down at my desk, I just stared at the typewriter. I couldn't bring myself to touch the damned thing.

I must have sat there twenty minutes without writing a word. Then that gambling blood of mine started working. A guy that's spent years laying it on the line gets to be pretty much a fatalist. What the hell, I said. It's water over the dam. And so I started in writing "Today in Town."

I'd just gotten to the point where I was telling how the Society for the Advancement of Atavism would meet the next morning in the Academy of Music when the machine jammed. Then it shifted by itself and, very slowly, the keys began to tap out a message.

I tell you, it was an eerie thing. A chill ran straight down my spine and up again. And yet, oddly enough, I had a funny thought: the thought was, what a lousy typist the Devil was. Not that he couldn't spell. He was just slow, like he was writing with one finger. Finally, what came up was:

American League

| | | R | H | E |
|-----------|------------------|----|---|---|
| Yankees | 004 101 000 20—8 | 13 | 2 | |
| Athletics | 130 001 100 21—9 | 14 | 0 | |

I stared at it for a long time. I really hadn't expected to hear any more from the Devil. I just figured that some day when he was good and ready he'd come along and collect my soul. After all, he'd really helped me out of my jam with McGonigle. It wasn't as if he was owing me anything more.

I knew what the message meant, of course. So after thinking it over a while, I walked across the city room to the sports department and stopped at Murgatroyd's desk.

"Bill," I said. "You've gotta believe me. When I got that tip on Devil May Care, I wanted to let you in on it. In fact, I wanted to borrow the dough to bet. But I was afraid of what you'd say. You'd already called the horse a bum."

Bill looked at me coldly. I could see he still thought that all along I'd got a tip from somebody at the track and that I was holding out on him. So I plunged on, "Now I got another good thing, Bill—"

Bill still remained silent.

"It's on the ball game tomorrow," I said. "The A's will take the Yanks, nine to eight, in the eleventh. The A's will make fourteen hits; the Yanks, thirteen. The Yanks will make two errors, the A's none. The A's will score with one run in the first inning, three in the second—"

While I was speaking, Bill's expression was changing. Now he held up a hand.

"Tommy," he began sadly. "Horse racing being the tarnished thing it is, it is not uncommon for a guy to get inside info. But—if you don't know yet that baseball is an honest racket, it's about time you learned. No guy living can predict what a score will be, let alone the hits and errors. Tommy, we've fished together, we've boozed together, we've lied each other out of jams. But I never expected to see the time when you would lie to me. Now please go away. You get in my hair."



I FELT bad about Bill's speech. It meant the end of everything between us, I could see that. And I didn't want it that way. But how could I tell him where I was getting my dope? I couldn't just come out and admit I was chummy with the Devil. And there were at least two reasons. One is that a guy's known by the company he keeps, and the other is that I wouldn't have been believed.

I got odds on the game, 7-5, I think it was, because the A's weren't doing so well just then. But when I started betting on the score, the odds got better. And they were really sensational when I bet on the inning-by-inning runs, and the hits and errors. The net result was that when I got through collecting the next night I had twenty-three G's in my kick.

I was feeling like I owned the world when I came down to work the next day. But not for long. I hadn't any more than poked my head in the office when Ace Carter, the city editor, yipped at me, "Tommy, c'mere!"

I walked up to his desk. He had the early editions of the afternoon papers spread out before him and a mean look on his face.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded. He pointed to the headlines. One read:

BASEBALL CZAR PROBES SCANDAL

Another read:
HERALD NEWSMAN
NETS THOUSANDS
IN GAMING COUP

The third said:
PLAYERS INVESTIGATED
ON CLAIM THEY THREW
GAME TO AID BETTORS

I was horrified. And I was more horrified when, reading down one of the columns, I came across an account of how I'd placed bets

with various betting commissioners, calling the turn right down to the last hit and run.

Carter was looking at me. "Well!" he said. I gulped.

"I made the dough all right," I admitted. "But there wasn't anything crooked about it."

"Nothing crooked!" Carter almost screamed. "Do you know who called me up just now? The Baseball Commissioner himself! Do you know where this puts the *Herald*? Right in a class with crooks, that's where!"

"Tommy," he went on, "you've got to come clean. Who were you playing with? How much kickback went to the players? And what players?"

"Nothing, none of the players," I said wildly, answering the last two questions.

"But where'd you get the dope?"

I was in a tight spot. I couldn't any more tell him where I got the information to place such crazy bets than I could explain to Murgatroyd about the horse. Finally, I murmured, "An old scamp, Chief, whose name I'm not at liberty to divulge."

"But Tommy," protested Carter, "don't you see that every player's name is under a cloud?"

I tried to talk sensibly.

"It shouldn't be," I said. "You have to believe me, I don't know of any skulduggery. But say for the sake of argument there was. Can you believe that every player was in on it? Can you believe they had any assurance of hitting or scoring exactly the way I bet they would? Why—the very fact the game went eleven innings shows they were all in there slugging to win."

The boss sat back, chewed his cigar, and pondered. I could see that my intelligent argument was taking effect. Certainly, a careful reading of those stories in the P.M.'s showed no proof that anybody else had profited besides me. But, on the other hand, the thing didn't add up rationally without a nigger in the woodpile.

"I ought to fire you," Carter said gruffly. I could see he was arguing with himself. Firing me would clear the *Herald* of any hook-up with what, it appeared, was already becoming a national scandal on the order of the famous Black Sox.



I DIDN'T like the idea of being fired, of course. It wasn't that I needed the job any more—not with twenty-three G's in my poke. But it would interfere with a long-range plan I was hatching. I simply had to keep the use of that typewriter.

I walked back to my desk and started writing my column. And while I was writing, I got another message. I went back up to the city desk.

"Look, Chief," I said. "It's up here, see?" I

tapped my head. "I get a hunch, and—bing! It pays off. Don't ask how. Maybe it's telepathy. I don't know. But, look! I know you got a gripe. But I don't want to lose my job. So let's do this: if I call the turn on the numbers payoff tomorrow, will you keep me?"

Carter looked at me as if he thought I'd been drinking.

"Tommy," he said gently. "Do you realize that the numbers play is based on the daily balance of the United States Treasury?"

"I do," I said. "On the last three digits before the decimal point."

"And do you realize that no mortal man can predict in advance—"

"I do," I said. "That's just what Bill Murgatroyd said about baseball. But—"

"But, Tommy—"

"But," I continued firmly, "the balance tomorrow will be \$16,775,494,862.08. That's billions, Chief. And the payoff will be on 862."

Carter drew in his breath sharply.

"Tommy," he said, "you're coo-coo."

"O.K.," I replied, "I'm coo-coo. But I'm telling you, 862 wins the numbers play tomorrow."

"Coo-coo," repeated Carter. "Now get back to your desk and try to act sane."

But it was kind of funny. That night I happened to see him in the C. & B. cigar store, talking with Nonnie Noonan, the neighborhood numbers writer. I saw him hand Nonnie a five-spot. And when Carter went out and crossed the street to the Child's restaurant, I slipped into the C. & B. and went up to Nonnie and asked, "What'd the boss bet on, 862?"

"How'd you know?" countered Nonnie.

"I'll take some, too," I said.

You can't bet much on the numbers. About ten bucks is the limit, and I only took a couple because I didn't want any more publicity.

Well, late the next afternoon I was working away and I happened to glance up as a copy boy put the final editions of the afternoon papers on Carter's desk. He picked up one and turned to the financial page and glanced down. And then I saw his mouth open. His chin thrust forward and his eyes blinked. He looked again. And then he glanced over at me.

He was \$2,000 richer, and I was \$800 to the good, because the numbers bankers were paying off 400 to 1 just then. He never said a word about it. But I knew my job was safe.

He never asked for any more tips. He wasn't really a gambling man, you see. I heard later he used the two grand to pay off the mortgage on his home.

Well, things went along. Every day the Devil came through with a good thing. There were yacht races, college track meets, the Memorial Day auto race at Indianapolis, the British golf championship, the Louis-Conn scrap. Within a month, I had more than four hundred grand.

I bought a twenty-room shack out on the Main Line. I bought a little cruiser I'd had my eye on. I invested in a night club. And every day I came to work in a sixteen-cylinder Cadillac complete with liveried chauffeur.

Boy, did I put on the dog.

And yet, you know, something was happening to me. I couldn't dope it out at first. I began feeling uneasy. I thought maybe it was losing Murgatroyd's friendship. I hated that, of course. And I thought maybe it had to do with the certain loss of my soul, too. But it wasn't entirely that, either. The way I figured it, I'd have to be dead before the Devil could collect, and when you're dead nothing matters, anyway.

Still, I'd go home at night with a jaded feeling. And I'd get up in the morning and I wouldn't have any appetite.



I CAME at last to realize what the trouble was. I'd been robbed of the one thing that mattered to me: the element of chance.

I was still placing bets, but it wasn't gambling. I knew how my bets would turn out, and the zest was gone.

That was mighty unfair of the Devil, I thought. For it was as if he'd taken my soul and left my body. I figured that wasn't according to the book.

I tried curing myself by sitting in for a few nights of poker at the Blue Pencil. But the stakes were too low to provide any excitement. Finally I dropped into McGonigle's place.

I guess the Slugger had expected me. He introduced me to the regulars. And it wasn't long before I was feeling a hell of a lot better. The stakes were high, and I had the fun of not knowing whether I'd win or lose. (Mostly I lost.) And I have to admit, it was a nice feeling to know that no matter how much I dropped, there would always be waiting for me the next day the means of recuperating my losses.

Things ran along like that for several months. Then, during the Christmas holidays, I ran into a string of bum luck.

It began Monday night when the cops raided my night club. I wasn't there, and I can't swear just what happened. But the charge concerned a bubble dancer.

On Tuesday I got a telegram that my cabin cruiser, which I'd chartered out for a Southern cruise, had sunk off Florida.

On Wednesday my big house burned down. On Thursday my chauffeur got drunk while I was at work and smashed into a taxicab and four women went to the hospital. And on Friday damage suits were filed against me and the court tied up my bank balance pending the outcome.

Everything happened so fast that I was caught with only a couple hundred bucks in my pants. On Saturday I managed to run this up to some \$6000 by virtue of a hot tip on the fourth at Hialeah. And with that little wad, I stopped in at McGonigle's on Sunday night to ride the roulette wheel.

It was a slow night. There were only three or four men playing at my table, and none of us talked much. The only sound was the hum of the wheel or the brief, clipped announcements of the croupier.

I was playing what the French call *en carré*. That is, I placed my money on the cross between four numbers—and I was staying with 28, 29, 31 and 32. My stake was the house limit of six hundred slugs. Had any of the four numbers won, I would have collected \$4800.

I came near it once or twice. But after eight spins, I gave up *en carré* and played *en plain*. When you play *en plain*, you concentrate on one number. On single numbers the house limit was lower—\$125. But the percentage of return was higher, 35 to 1. I put my bet on Number 14—and damned if the ball didn't come to rest on 29!

In two more turns of the wheel, I was broke. That was when I made my mistake. I strolled into McGonigle's office and hit him for a loan. I borrowed four hundred bucks.

A piddling sum, you might say, for a guy who'd been handling hundreds of thousands in recent months. But I needed it to finance whatever tip the Devil planned to give me the next day. That way I could get back on my feet.

"Just till tomorrow night?" McGonigle said. "O.K." I didn't like the way he smiled. "I guess you know, down here we always pay our little bills prompt. Health insurance, we call it."

I'd heard that before. I grinned.

"Natch," I said.

I wasn't worried this time. Why should I be? I went home, slept well, got up, put away a plate of ham and eggs, and went to work.

I remember wondering, as I entered the city room, what form my tip would take. Horse racing, probably. That's all I'd been getting lately, and I didn't like it so well. It meant placing small bets with several bookies.

Ace Carter saw me come into the office.

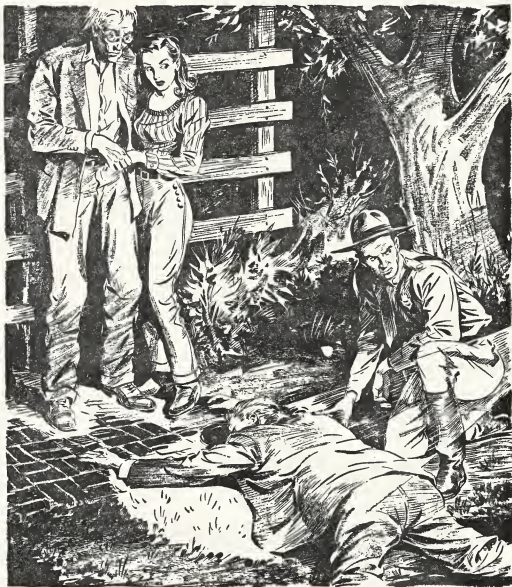
"Tommy," he said, "you've been doing some pretty good work lately. I've got a surprise for you."

He led me back to my desk. There, streamlined and gleaming, was a brand new typewriter. "Beauty, isn't it?" Carter said.

I couldn't speak.

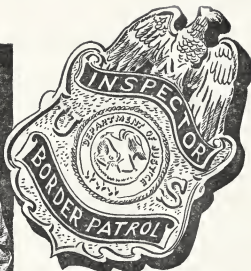
Well—that was this noon. And now it's "tomorrow night." And I'm sitting here in this lousy hotel room . . . waiting. I wonder whether McGonigle will come himself, or send one of his boys.

Hodge lay on his belly, his head pointing away from the arbor, his left cheek exposed; he had not been dead long.



THE *Crooked* MILE

ILLUSTRATED BY
MONROE EISENBERG



A QUARTER of a mile from where the dirt road branches off the Tucson highway, I swung my horse into the chaparral. Misery Hill was right in front of me now. It was all there was between me and the Sierra Madres of northern Sonora, a fact of some importance in my line of business.

The sun was down, but the edges of the sky still glowed like a heated horseshoe half cooled. My pony's hooves beat up the alkali with a sound like churning clabber. A dry, debilitated breeze caught the white puffballs and rolled them into dusty tumbleweed behind me. I wondered why I liked this God-forsaken country. I wondered why I liked being a Border Patrol inspector. I wondered how much longer I would be one.

There seemed to be some doubt about that in the mind of my superior officer, Senior Inspector Gaines Kerby, of the Yucca City Post, who had told me less than an hour ago: "You'd better make up your mind, Jim Silvers, whether you want to be a Border Patrolman or a politician. Your one-year probationary period is about up. During that time, I'm compelled to say, you have added to your war record considerable notoriety as a *bravo*—particularly in clashes with the local law. You've built up quite a following of fans. Citizens have even suggested that you carry your feud with Clyde Wingo to the polls and run against him for chief-of-police. And—" he had hunched toward me, touching his tongue to his lips like a man sampling quinine, "if you have found our routine too tame and cramping, then that's exactly what I suggest you do."

Nice sarcasm, well thought out, aptly expressed, typical of Gaines Kerby. It was a

By
JOHN H.
KNOX

shame he wasted it on a thickhead like me because all I got was a quick translation into the vulgate running: "If you can't find anything better to do than brawl on street corners at a time when higher-ups are swearing there's an alien pipeline through our sub-district, then you'd better get the hell out of the service."

Not that he didn't like me; he just didn't like my methods. Fighting fire with fire was not his idea of cricket, nor lone-wolfing the tactics for a rookie—even if he was an ex-Marine.

"What I like about you, Chief," I told him, "is the way we understand each other. You don't just read my thoughts, you think 'em for me." Then I looked at him sadly, a tight-knit little man in a bare little office, where he had been for ten years, keeping his uniform, his reports and his conscience all clean. A stubborn little man with a lean, uncompromising jawline and chipped porphyry eyes. A square man, a brave man, a good man to ride the river with. And a flat failure. Because he was bucking a set-up in Yucca City that no man could buck and hew to the line, technically. Me, I like results. I thought I might as well tell him.

"Probably," he said drily when I had finished, "I ought to battle Sam Noon publicly in the plaza."

"Nope."

"Maybe I should appease him?"

"Maybe you should light a fire under him."

Gaines had turned toward the window, not in evasion, nor in fear; he didn't know what the latter was. "Bring me some evidence that Sam Noon is violating immigration laws—or any Federal law—and if he wears the governor on his watch fob, I will still nail his hide to the wall."

"Sam Noon," I said, "did not get to be the Boss around here without having brains enough to know that. Sam does not stick his neck out in Federal territory. But his shadow sticks out there. It covers the ones who do. Crime interlocks. And even the Border Patrol can't function in a vacuum where witnesses are afraid to testify and tips are as scarce as an unsold vote in Congress."

"Go ahead, run for chief-of-police," Gaines said.

"Do you think Sam Noon could stop me?"



GAINES had turned and looked at me with his hard dry eyes, his hard dry smile. "Sam might not try; he might support you. His present whipping-boy, Clyde Wingo, is about washed up. And Sam likes your type—tough young realists who worship results."

"And he'd make another Clyde Wingo out of me?"

"Only by degrees. Painlessly," Gaines' thin lips clipped the words off like nippers biting

wire. "A little compromise, a little eye-shutting at first. After a man walks that first crooked mile with Sam, the rest is all downhill, much easier."

"A man might not have to walk with Sam," I said. "There's a decent element here, quiescent but not extinct. The cattle people who used to support Seth Honepaugh. If old Seth could be prodded into a comeback . . ."

"That old gray ghost," Gaines had muttered, shaking his head.

Probably he was right, I thought now. But a ghost can have his uses. There was the ghost of Banquo, the ghost of Hamlet's father. So I had a ghost of a chance. I had a card to play too, which I had not showed Gaines. Maybe that wasn't cricket either, but if he was so smart at reading my mind, why didn't he see that too?

The sky had grown colorless, like a goldfish out of water. Misery Hill was a clenched black fist above the gray and tongueless monte. Down on its lowest knuckle a single light glowed like a yellow diamond solitaire. I hoped Seth Honepaugh would be there alone. But no matter who was there, I meant to say what I had to say.

I rode up the steep ramp of rock and sand that was the only approach to the high small mesa where the house sat, impregnable as a moated castle. The big strong gate of steel pipe and wolf wire was open, and I rode in. There was a parking space where the gravel shone white like pounded shell and I saw that Hodge Honepaugh's tan coupe was parked there.

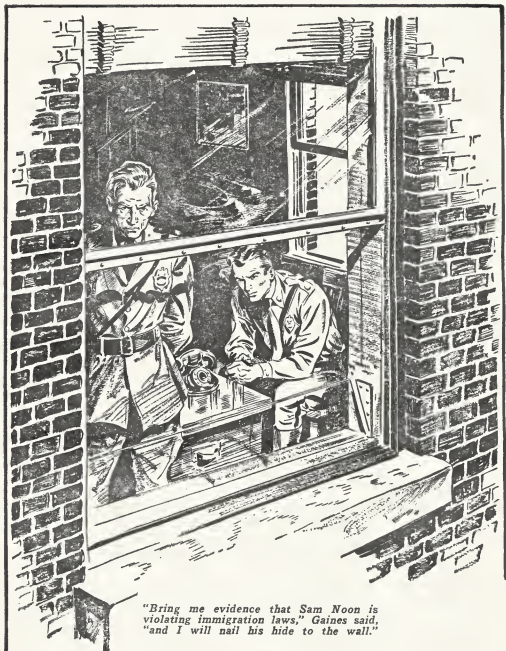
I hitched my horse to a cedar post with an iron ring and walked toward the sprawling pile of adobe. Trees were thick here and there was watered grass and the air smelt of oleanders. Light from the deep windows had the hot salmon color of a cantaloupe's meat and everything was very still.

I hammered on the axe-hewn door with its long strap hinges of wrought iron and Angie Honepaugh opened it and said "Hello," in the same disinterested tone she would have used to call "Help," if the house had been afire.

"Hello," I said, "I want to see your father."

That seemed to take a little thought, so she looked at me out of her dusty, black, expressionless eyes. She was a little thing and her beige jodhpurs fitted her like a snake's skin; she had a snake's grace too, and his gift of silence. And if you think a snake can't be beautiful, you never saw a rattler flow down a rock.

She was twenty-seven, but didn't look it. Something in old Seth's northern blood must have checked the lush too-rapid flowering of her mother's race. She was the daughter of Seth's second—Indian—wife. Angie had skin the color of a meerschaum just beginning to darken and so flawless you half expected her green jade ear pendants to ring against her



"Bring me evidence that Sam Noon is violating immigration laws," Gaines said, "and I will nail his hide to the wall."

cheeks and the sleek gunmetal hair banded with red velvet.

"I'll see . . ." she said finally and gave me the slow smile that made all the town girls hate her, but which did not mean a thing at all. She had been Clyde Wingo's woman since she was seventeen. She opened the door. "Come in."

I stepped into the hall and rolled my sharp-edged hat in my hands and watched her melt into a dark doorway where only the hall light slanted in. "Silvers," I heard her whisper, "that big, awkward-looking one . . ." Then she stepped out. "Just go on in," she told me and came past me and forgot to smile this time.

I walked into a dim silent room where I knew

an old man was waiting who had very little use for light. I saw first a big chess board on a stool, and behind it, a tall carved chair where somebody seemed to have flung an old suit. Then the old suit moved and Seth Honepaugh sat forward.

He didn't speak, just gave me a sort of nod, and I let him weigh me while I soaked in the low room melting into shadows, the great beamed ceiling stained with ox-blood, the Navajo rugs, the old muskets over the mantel, the table made of polished steer horn. And the tobacco-and-old-man smell. Then I looked at the carved ivory chessmen, set up for a game but with no move made, and the opening I wanted came to me.

"Looks like you conceded the game without a fight," I said.

I don't know if he got it. I couldn't see his face plainly enough to tell. They said he had played poker with John Wesley Hardin in the old days, so maybe I wouldn't have known anyhow.

"You play?" he asked.

"I know the moves of the pieces is about all."

"Well, sit down. Try one."



BACK in the shadows a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles flashed and a case snapped, and I pulled up a chair and sat. I started a conventional opening. I don't know exactly what happened, except that during the first few moves, he shoved his queen out and I took her and while I was still thinking he was too blind to see what he had done, he checkmated me.

"Sacrifice play." His chuckle came brittle as thin glass walked on. "Didn't think you'd fall for it."

"I didn't think you saw what you were doing."

"Oh, I see what I'm doing," he said. He tapped the spectacles that made two glassy blurs like a cat's eyes in the dark. "Without 'em, I don't see anything. But there's one thick lens to equalize what little vision I got, so what I see at all, I see straight."

"Well, I'm no match for you anyhow," I said. "I guess a man should quit when the odds are that uneven against him, shouldn't he? Caution is the better part of valor, and he who fights and runs—"

I let it hang there, figuring I had drawn blood now if he had any left in him. His rusty old fingers tensed on the carved black rook he had been toying with, and his face came forward like something on the end of a pole. In the light I could see that he was not quite the mindless ghost they said he was.

His hair, thin, long and yellow-white, hung in a dirty backdrop for the old face, beaked like a falcon, wrinkled and wasted, but with

the strong lines which even his fleshless skeleton would have retained. Magnified by the spectacles, the pale wet eyes in their sockets of carnelian held still a shadow of fire. They moved over my face with the unapologetic appraisal of the near-blind and then he laid the rook back on the board slowly and carefully, and leaned back, folding his hands.

"Riddles get tiresome," he said. "Speak it out."

"I'd rather," I said. "I'm not by nature very subtle. I wasn't trying to be impudent just now. But ever since I was a kid I have admired you, your legend, the things you stood for in a lawless time. Now I want some advice from you."

"What kind of advice?"

"Political," I said. "Maybe you've seen me around, maybe not. I've been here about a year with the Border Patrol. That's not long for a man to be in a place and run for office, but I'm thinking of announcing for chief-of-police."

"What would you want to do that for?"

"Maybe," I said, "because I'm tired of being stymied in the job I've been trying to do. Maybe I'm a wild-haired reformer. Maybe I just like a good fight—in the open."

The fingers of his right hand played with a fold of the faded Levis over one bony knee. Then a low laugh that did not invite participation bubbled away down in his old throat. "Don't you know men don't come and ask me if they can run for office any more? The man you want to see is Sam Noon."

"No, the man I want to see is you."

"I'm an old man," he said in a haggling tone. "I'm half-blind, defeated and discredited these ten years."

"Not discredited," I said. "Your name still stands for something along three hundred miles of border. People may say Sam Noon bluffed you to a standstill ten years ago, but they don't say he bought you with money."

He thought that over. "They say he bluffed me?"

"Well—it's a way of putting it. They say a man named Tom Eckhart, whom you had warned away from your daughter, was found dead on your land. They say Eckhart did not die of a fall from a horse as was officially reported. They say you shot him, but that old Doc Holsum, who's dead now, and Sam Noon, who was just a new-come undertaker then, with an eye for an opportunity, covered up for you. They say that Sam Noon's price was for you to get out of local politics and leave him the field."

He didn't move or make a comment. The story was no news to him, though it may have been a novelty to have a man speak it out bluntly to his face. After a long moment he asked, "You believe it?"

I said, "No."

He cleared his throat like a man uncertain whether he wants to ask any more questions or not. But finally he did.

"What do you believe?"

I leaned over and picked up his black queen which I had taken in the game. "In chess," I said, "a queen is a man's right arm, his fighting heart. Without her he's crippled and impotent. A king, on the other hand, is a helpless thing, a liability. Yet a man will sacrifice a queen to protect his king. Why? Because the king represents something imponderable—like honor, duty, family. He's the game itself. So . . . well, it was a sacrifice play you made ten years ago."

"You talk good chess; could you be specific?"

I turned and glanced at the open door behind me. "Any fool," I said, "ought to know that if you had killed Tom Eckhart, you would have faced it out and never run to Sam Noon for cover. But if one of your family—say your son, Hodge, who was about twenty then—had done it, that might have been a different matter."



HE DIDN'T answer. The silence grew strained like a spring wound tight. "Why did you come here to say this to me?" he asked finally.

"Well," I said, "before I go into politics, I've got to do a final, unpleasant job to do in the Border Patrol. It's going to affect you. I wanted you to know in advance because when the trouble starts, I want you to be on my side. The plain fact is that Hodge, the son you sacrificed everything to shield, has been stabbing you in the back, using your decent name as a front to cover his dirty operations. When the lid blows off some people are going to say you were in it. I want you to deny it, to disown Hodge and cut him loose, and take your stand behind me to fight it out and clean this place up."

The old man had stiffened, sat forward again. "That's strong talk. I don't know if it would be wise for Hodge to hear you."

I said, "He's heard me. Today. I didn't show my cards, but I called him a rat. He may not have considered that an insult; he didn't do anything. Clyde Wingo, however, heard it and put in his two-bits' worth, and I had to smack him and take a dressing down from Gaines Kerby for what he calls mixing in local politics."

The old man sat back in his chair. His face was invisible again, but the long fingers of his right hand were drumming the chair arm now, drumming, drumming, like tom-toms beating in an Indian village. Then it stopped and he said, "I don't know just what you mean. Hodge owns a lumber yard. He's friendly with Sam Noon and Clyde Wingo, who are no friends of mine, as you know. And I understand Hodge

has dabbled in black market lumber, getting it from Mexico and bootlegging it on the highways around the cities. But that's all over now. Is that what you mean?"

"If that was all he'd used his trucks for," I said, "it wouldn't be my headache. What I mean is alien-running, a trade that attracts the same sort of human scum that used to operate slave ships and scuttle them with blacks in the holds. And it's a fact that Hodge has been using this place of yours—"

The hand on the chair arm knotted. "Using my home?"

"Using your home," I said, "a place that even Gaines Kerby, a skeptic if there ever was one, wouldn't think of raiding. Cashing in on your blindness, using your good name for a screen. I'm not guessing. I've cut trail on every patrol, I've narrowed it down, and night before last I saw enough to cinch it . . . Now, if I can prove it's true, what do you say to my proposal?"

Seth's head sagged a little on his thin old neck; the hands now folded across his ribs twitched like a dog in his sleep. "If Hodge has done me like that," he said, "I'd kill him with my own hands."

Somewhere a clock ticked in the shadows. Then I heard again what I had heard before but had taken for the whisper of Angie's feet in the hall. Only it wasn't Angie's voice that brought me up in my chair with my hand on my holstered revolver.

It was not a move I was proud of; it had in it something nervous and inept. But there I froze while the low voice asked, "Kill Hodge why, Seth?" and it was Sam Noon's voice.

He stood in the doorway, filling it. He was tall, and wide and solid. His gray tailored suit fitted sleekly and did not bulge with artillery anywhere. Sam boasted that he did not have to go heeled.

He had only one eye, his left one, and the Mexicans said he could put a hex on you with it. It was the color of a gray bone button and you could see just that far into it. You could read his face just that well too. It was broad and heavy jowled and of a pale color which the sun never seemed to affect, any more than internal warmth ever altered his bland, meaningless, undertaker's smile.

"Hello, Jim." His tone was a gentle deprecation of my ridiculous hand-on-gun crouch. "How do you feel, Seth?"

There was something in his voice which suggested a doctor's pointed inquiry and it jarred old Seth's tight pose.

"Why, uh, well enough. . . Why do you ask?"

Sam Noon carefully removed his unlit cigar and spoke to it "I was just wondering if you could stand a shock." His lone eye lifted sadly. "It's Hodge. . . he's down by the old well. He seems to be . . . dead."

CHAPTER II

THE BOOTED GHOST



I GUESS I should have thought of old Seth then, of the shock to his tired old heart. But the fact is I couldn't think of anything but what a plain, blind, blundering fool I had been. Now I knew that in that fracas in town today I must have tipped my hand. Somebody had figured I had the goods on Hodge and somebody had shut his loose mouth in the only effectual way. I was sure of it—even before I saw how he'd died.

Seth took the news in stony silence and we followed Sam outside. From down under the dark trees there came a sound of throttled sobbing and we knew that Angie had heard and had found her half-brother. Halfway between the gate and the house, a path diverged from the gravel and ended at a grapevine arbor that sheltered an old well. Hodge Honepaugh lay on a grassplot just outside it.

He was a big man, not as tall as his father, but fleshed out solidly. He had on gray mole-skin pants, half stuffed into black boots with white cut-outs, and a light tan tropical coat. He was lying on his belly, his head pointing away from the arbor, his left cheek exposed. At the crown of his head an incipient bald spot showed pinkly through a thin fuzz, and just beneath, and above the brown neck, veined like an orange peel, were two bumps. The larger had a jagged crack from which blood had run clear to the balding spot on the crown.

Sam Noon had snapped on a flash and I went down on my knees and felt Hodge's wrist where the pulse should have been and ran my fingers under his shirt. He had not been dead long; from the warmth of his body and the slight coagulation of the blood I guessed not much over an hour. There was a snub-nosed .38 revolver in his pocket but his hands were nowhere near it.

"How long since you saw him, Seth?" I asked.

"About forty-five minutes before you came," Seth said. "Around seven-fifteen, I reckon. It's eight-thirty now. Hodge parked his car and came past my window and said to tell Angie not to wait supper for him as he had to ride out and see a fellow about some lumber. He went toward the stables and I never saw him again. He often goes off that way. I went to the kitchen where Angie was and we ate supper and after a little bit you came."

"You, Angie?" I asked.

"I never saw Hodge at all," she said. "Just heard his car drive in at the usual time. You can't see much for the trees around the windows so I never noticed if he got a horse and rode off or not."

If Hodge had gone from the house to the stables, he would have passed the well-arbor at a distance of at least thirty feet—unless someone lurking there had called him over.

"Someone must have been waiting here for Hodge," I said. "Someone called him over here and struck him down without warning."

"Without warning?" Sam asked casually.

"It wasn't a fight," I said. "It would have been heard at the house. And Hodge would at least have drawn his gun. He didn't. He was hit twice; the lower blow probably stunned him. The second, higher one, must have struck him while he was doubled over, because the blood ran upward to the crown of the head, as it couldn't have done if he had been upright. So it was a cold piece of treachery." I stood up and looked at Sam Noon. "How did you happen to get here afoot, Sam?"

"I walked from the highway," Sam said easily. "Ran out of gas. It's only a quarter of a mile across the sand. I walked straight from there and came straight in. I saw there wasn't any light in Hodge's room and started for the stables, thinking maybe he was there, and that's how I happened to find him."

"Any way of proving when you stopped on the highway?"

"Nothing but my word, I guess," Sam said unconcernedly.

I borrowed his flash and prowled about a little, but did not find any weapon. And no footprints, since it was all grass here.

"Whoever did it," I said, "has had plenty of time to get away. But this whole mesa sits in an ocean of sand. Without a helicopter he couldn't have escaped without leaving tracks. Let's go see."



WE WENT along the path and down through the gate. Everything was graveled there, including the ramp leading down. But where it ended at the flat chaparral, the road was just blown sand too. The tracks of Hodge's coupe were plain there, and my pony's hoofprints over them.

Sam showed his tracks which came straight out of the sand from the highway direction. You could tell they were the prints of cowboy boots with high heels like the ones he wore, and they were fresh.

I sprayed the light along the vague edges of the road on the other side and soon found what I was hunting. A double set of footprints, paralleling each other at a distance of about six feet, one set coming and the other going—toward the border.

"Well," Sam Noon expelled his breath, "there he went, and he's had plenty of time to cross the border by now. It's only a mile here. I warned Hodge about those Mexicans he's been buying lumber from."

"You think it was that?" I asked.

Sam gave me a polite, puzzled stare. "Wouldn't it seem so? Hodge dealt with some tough customers, had trouble with them. One who had a beef and knew that Hodge lived close to the line here must have just strolled across, bumped him off, and strolled back to Mexico and safety."

I looked at old Seth, standing vacant-eyed and silent with Angie's arm around him. "Did Hodge bring Mexicans here to talk business?"

"Never," Seth said flatly.

"Then," I told Sam, "your theory is out. No Mexican, without knowing exactly the lay of the land and the habits of the family, would ever have walked right into Seth Honepaugh's grounds and waited for Hodge to come and get killed. This thing was perfectly timed. The killer knew Seth's eyes are bad and that Angie would be busy with supper in the kitchen and that he probably wouldn't be seen crossing the chaparral. He also knew just about the time Hodge was generally in the habit of getting home."

"Well," Sam said pointedly, his lips smiling but his single eye cold as a dead lobster's, "you can be glad it ain't your headache, Jim." He looked at Angie. "Could you pull yourself together, Miss Honepaugh, and drive Hodge's car in to town to get a doctor and find Sheriff Harv Otter?"

Angie nodded and walked away. Sam turned to Seth, ignoring me now completely. "Well, Seth, you and I might go back and see if we can find the murder weapon."

"Hold on," I said. "Don't go beating through those bushes and messing up clues. And if I'm not here when Harv Otter comes out, just tell him not to mess up these footprints either—any of them."

Sam Noon stopped and slowly turned; the way he removed his cigar delicately from between his lips was a study in pantomime. "I thought," he said carefully, "that you were still working for Immigrations, Jim. Are they handling murder cases now?"

"If you'll look at these tracks," I told him, "you'll see it's pretty plain where they come from. And any man who crosses the border illegally, whether he's a murderer or an archbishop, is my meat."

I gave him back his flashlight, went to my pony and unhitched him and rode off.

I went first to the highway and found Sam's parked car just where he said it was, on a little spur that ran off the highway into a thicket of dwarf oaks used by necking parties. The gas tank was empty all right; he had evidently had just enough left to pull off the highway after his carburetor started spitting. Of course he could have drained most of his gas out back along the highway, but I didn't have time to investigate that angle now.



I WAS wheeling my horse out of the oak tangle when a sound near its outer edge caused me to rein up. I had my own flash now in my

bridle hand, and I laid my right arm on my gun and shot a beam toward the sound. It lit up a crouching, startled figure. He couldn't have been more than sixteen, and his face hadn't been washed in a week, and his khaki shirt and breeches never. An old felt hat with a saw-toothed edge was pulled low over his light-blinded eyes and his arms were so high they seemed ready to fly out at the sockets.

"I never went near that car, Mister," he stammered. "I never touched a thing . . . swear to God . . . you look and see . . ."

He undoubtedly expected to be shot in his tracks. "Take it easy, son," I said. "I'm the Border Patrol. What are you doing here?"

"Border Patrol!" His eyes got big and shiny as new dollars. "Geez! I come west figurin' I might join that outfit!"

"Sure. But why are you holed up here?"

"Oh," he said, "I was waitin' for that old barstid to get back so maybe I could thumb a ride with him."

"You were here when he stopped?"

"Well, I was back down the road a piece. Me and him had a little run-in when he first passed me. I had about give up tryin' to get a ride tonight and had built me a fire and was going to roast a bird I'd killed with my sling-shot. Then along comes this old jerk and yells, 'You can't build a fire there, kid!'

"So I says, 'I done built one.' And he says, 'Yeah, and I'll put it out for you too.' So he got out and stomped it out and drove off cussing. Well, I had no fire, so I started on again, and about a quarter of a mile down the road I seen him pull off and stop."

"Did you see him drain any gas out of his car?"

"No. Why would he do that? He was outta gas. He went off through the sand carrying an oil can like he was going to get some. I come on up, thinking, 'Well, it serves him right, and I ought to let the air out of his tires.' But I didn't. I wanted a ride now worse'n anything, so I just waited for him to come back."

"I see. And I don't suppose, by any chance, you would know what time it was when he stopped?"

"Why not?" he asked, offended. "I got a watch." One hand slapped a bulge in his pants where a plaited shoestring ran down. "I looked, just wondering how long it would take him. It was five to eight."

Something down under my ribs took a nose-dive. That did it. It confirmed Sam's alibi completely. It had been just about eight o'clock when I reached the Honepaugh place. Sam had walked in about twenty minutes later.

That was just about the time it would have taken him for the walk across the sand. And Hodge had certainly been dead before then. If Sam had killed him he couldn't have been dead more than about ten minutes when I examined him.

So I had to write Sam off. But at least it was something definite. And the kid was still an important witness. I said, "Are you hungry?"

"Hungry? Mister, I could eat a skunk pickled in his own juice. I ain't et since I left a little jerk town the other side of El Paso last night. Come straight through El Paso with a farmer who dropped me at a crossroads."

I took out my notebook and scrawled on a sheet: *Fix this boy up with a bed. We may need him as a witness.—Silvers.* I tore it out and handed it to him along with a dollar bill. "This will get you a bed at our headquarters,"



My flash lit up a startled figure. "I never went near that car, mister," he stammered. "Swear to God..."

I said, "and the dollar bill will get you a good feed. Town's not far; if you don't catch a ride, I'll pick you up later."

"Gees, Cap," he glanced at the note, "I don't want to take no money for helping the Border Patrol."

"Just consider it a loan," I told him and rode off.

Though I had to scratch Sam off as a possible killer of Hodge Honepaugh, I had still got one little nugget to tuck away in my pocket. It was a possible answer to the question: Why had

Sam put the boy's fire out? I doubted that he had stopped merely as a civic duty. But right along this stretch of highway was where a truck might signal to aliens holed up on Misery Hill. A fire might easily confuse those signals. It suggested that Sam might have an interest in that.

I rode back to Misery Hill but did not go into the Honepough grounds. Instead I began following the double set of tracks toward the border. About all I could tell from their shapeless imprint in the sand was that they did not seem to have been made by cowboy boots, and that the walker had a long stride. I hoped to find some plain enough to be used for taking rough measurements.

That was not going to be so simple. Footprints, hoofprints, tire tracks, have been my hobby ever since I've been in the service. In spite of the required boning on immigrations and naturalization laws, criminal laws, court procedure and rules of evidence, I've still found time for this useful science. If you will give me, for instance, those "sharply defined footprints in the moist earth under the murder window" which are so plentiful in detective stories, I will, even without that "light shower that began at six and ended at six-fifteen," go to town for you. And if I can get enough accurate measurement to work out the walking picture formula:

| | | | | | | |
|--------|----|----|-----|----|----|--------|
| r | ra | rv | raa | ll | bb | |
| H — BS | — | | | — | — | I will |
| l | la | lv | lll | rl | rb | |

give you an identification almost as good as a fingerprint and tell you more about your man.

So all I needed was the nice prints in the moist earth. And what I had was a series of double-barreled pot holes across a stretch of semi-desert which hadn't been wet since the seashells were left there.



THE tracks led at first toward a hazy landmark across the border—a camel's-hump in the low Sonora foothills called the *Dos Piedras* and where there was an old abandoned copper mine of that name. These peaks kept slipping lower on the horizon as the ground sloped into a swag, until presently they were out of sight. Then the tracks began swinging in a gradual arc to the left. This continued until the ground rose again, and then the trail straightened abruptly and headed directly for the *Dos Piedras* again.

I stopped and lit a cigarette and tried to straighten that out in my mind. It didn't quite tally with my theory. Finally I rode on and it was downhill again to the wire fence that marked the border here. But to reach it you crossed a shallow dry wash where the sand was packed in spots, and I figured that the best tracks I would find would be here.

I dismounted and studied the two trails. They were only about ten feet apart here, and they had never crossed each other. It was obvious that, on his second trip, the man had simply followed his earlier trail.

I went down on my hunkers and sprayed my flash on the set that led toward the border. The prints were still vague but I could be pretty certain that the sharp heel of a cowboy boot hadn't made them. Neither had an entirely flat heel. An engineer's field-boot, with a slightly shaped heel, seemed to fill the bill.

I took out of my saddle bag three folding rules and a small pair of compass-dividers, and set to work. I squared off a set of tracks with two of the rules, jotted stride length, stride breadth, and approximate length of each print. Then I folded the third rule into a V-shape, and with the compass-dividers got the "foot-angle".

This was thirty-three degrees—on the heavy side for a man walking normally. The step length was thirty-six inches—above average, even for fast walking. The boots were about tens, or tens-and-a-half, and the same pair had made both trails. I checked the other trail on the measurements too, and since they didn't vary much, I concluded that my man didn't limp, wasn't drunk, and hadn't been carrying a heavy burden either way. So I had a big man, walking at a fast, steady clip, probably in field boots. Not a whole lot, but something.

I had put my stuff away and strolled on a few yards when, all of a sudden, the hairs on my neck got up and walked.

What I noticed first was that the line of tracks had come to a halt at the banks of the draw—two soleprints paralleling each other, deeply embedded and with no heel prints visible. It meant that the man had squatted down, probably to spy out the hills he was approaching. But what had caused the queer activity among my hair roots was something else. Not five inches from the right sole-print of the crouching man, were two very shallow, sharp, distinct imprints of a pair of cowboy boots—just those and no more anywhere around!

It was as if a weightless ghost—maybe the ghost of the killer's victim—had materialized briefly and stood beside him.

That, of course, was the impression of a moment. The truth came with the swift impact of color sighted in a gold pan. The killer had been carrying his own boots and wearing another pair—either some he had stolen, or some he would later destroy. And since he wouldn't have deliberately set them down like that just to make a beautiful laboratory impression for me, the chances were that he had carried them slung from his belt. When he had crouched, the boot soles had touched that

sheet of sand over a buried rock reef, and he had got up and gone on without ever knowing that he had left me almost the equivalent of a fingerprint!

I don't carry material for making casts in my saddle bag, but I do carry some flattened cardboard boxes for preserving them. I got a couple of these and made a shelter over the ghostly prints, weighting the boxes down with rocks and hiding them with loose brush.

One thing more I got: the boots had obviously been slung from the right side of the man's belt. So he hadn't been wearing a holstered gun there. Either he was left-handed (and I didn't see any marks of the holster on his left side) or he had carried his gun somewhere else—if he carried one.

It was not far to the fence now and the old cabin at the abandoned mine was only a few hundred yards beyond it. I had a hunch there might be something interesting there. I led my horse down the draw, tied him to the roots of some dwarf mesquite bushes, with his bit out so that he could nibble the dry sweet beans, and went on afoot. I did not use my flashlight any more. I reached the wire fence and crawled through onto Mexican soil. I hoped there would be no *Fiscale* patrols about tonight, because I had no right to be over there at all.

CHAPTER III

OUT OF BOUNDS



BEYOND the fence, the ground climbed sharply toward the double-hump that shadowed the old mine. A deep ravine made a wavering chalk scrawl up the slope. No light showed where the old cabin ought to be, and I went on until I could see the gray outline of its rock walls and the sod roof melting into the barranca's shoulder.

Then I stopped. What had been a blank wall was sliced suddenly by a knife-blade of light. A heavy blanket over a window had been shifted. It had fallen back, but not before its gleam had touched the dark outline of a huddle of figures squatting peon-fashion against the wall.

Instantly I was flat on my belly, my .45 double-action service revolver in my hand. Holding it ahead of me and a few inches off the ground, I crawled toward the base of a sotol stalk whose spiked blades, like the bayonets of stacked rifles, gave me shutters to peer through.

Almost at once there was activity up above. A brief flash like heat-lightning glared behind the cabin and went out as a door was opened and closed. Then a voice was speaking in good American, which the acoustics of the arroyo bore down to me, "Get 'em going,

Miguel. But wait at the hill for the flash from the highway before you shove them further. If you don't get it, hold them until I arrange the hideout for the night."

There it was—the whole machinery of it in a nutshell—the way-station that made it feasible, the Honepaugh place. Because, once they had crossed, we always figured to get them by slipping a patrol behind them and picking them up between the fence and the highway. Or we could hold them and beat the brush of Misery Hill to pick them up next day. But not if they had food, water, shelter, and a fresh start after it was dark again.

They were coming down the trail now. Against the opposite barranca wall, I counted a dozen shuffling figures, and I could smell the mesquite-smoke aroma which identifies them like the bouquet of a Scotch whisky. A man with a carbine came behind, herding them like sheep. He was a Mexican, evidently the one addressed as Miguel. If so, the man who had given him instructions was still at the cabin. I lay quiet and they passed me and went down the trail.

Now it was up to me. In five minutes they would be crossing the line. I could follow them and gather them in like chips off a roulette table. But I wanted that man up above. Not just because he was a ringleader, but because the tracks of Hodge Honepaugh's killer led definitely in his direction. But he was on foreign soil, where I had no authority and no business being. On the other hand, my duty to arrest the crossing aliens was clear-cut. So—

So I went on toward the cabin.

And I walked right under a deadfall. I had made about ten yards in a crouch when light exploded from the hillside to my left and above me, and a voice said, "Freeze, Mac, and get them up!"

I knew what was up there, if I had stopped to think. Above the gray smudge of an ore drift there was the black opening to a cross-cut driven into the hillside to connect with the mine's main tunnel, which was beyond the house. The man at the cabin had gone into the mine and come around through the tunnel to outflank me. Because it was the same voice, and I knew whose it was now. But the barrel of a rifle slanting past the light was looking me square in the eyes, so I let my revolver drop and straightened.

I didn't know if he would come down or not. He hadn't known who I was until he'd flashed the light and the challenge was already half out of his mouth. Then he had a tiger by the tail. But he decided to brazen it out. He came on down—Clyde Wingo, Yucca City's police-chief.

He was a big man, almost as big as Sam Noon, and he was wearing a khaki hunting outfit. He picked his way carefully, keeping



Clyde Wingo

the gun on me, and I had a good view of his tan bench-made boots with the fancy cut-out work and the very square toes. They reminded me of some prints I had seen not long ago.

"Playing them in the open now, Clyde?" I asked.

He was close to me now, and he stopped, a swarthy man who wore his thick black hair in long sideburns, who had a good jawline and a well-shaped nose, but narrow-set feverish eyes. "If you mean that batch of smoke-eaters that just went past," he said, "I didn't see you stopping them. That's your business, not mine. I just happened to be over here hunting coyotes. Followed one in that hole up there and saw this bunch congregating at the cabin, so I stayed to watch. Just now I thought you were one of their outfit."



HE WASN'T trying to insult my intelligence; he knew I knew it was a lie. He was just making clear the point that I had no definite evidence to tie him to them, which was true. And I figured he was too worried about Hodge's killing to care much about the alien-running angle now.

I said, "In that case, you can give me a hand. Douse your light and we'll follow them and take them when they cross."

That put it up to him. His pinched-up, reddened eyes felt over me like bloody fingers. "How come you crossed over the line?"

"I followed some tracks I picked up between here and the Honepaugh place," I said, skipping over the murder in the hope that he would

think Hodge's body hadn't been found. "A double set of tracks which looked like somebody had gone over to arrange for overnight guests."

He played it dumb. "A fresh trail?"

"Not more than a few hours old."

"Yeah? Well, I been in this neighborhood a couple hours. I never seen nobody come from that direction."

"They're there anyhow." I looked at his boots.

"Ain't thinking they're my tracks? I came through the gate at Yucca City. I got a Mexican hunting-license, you know."

I said, "They aren't the tracks of those boots you've got on. But you've got some field boots; I've seen you wear them."

"Sure, and they're out in the shed at home with my fishing gear. Let's go take a gander at them tracks."

"Can I pick my gun up?"

He screwed his face into a frown. "Nope," he stooped and picked it up himself, "I think you better not. Might get some funny ideas to arrest me, even though you got no evidence."

"I'm suppose to arrest those aliens. You're sticking your neck out if you stop me."

"It's my neck," he said. "Lead on down to them tracks."

As I said, he had a tiger by the tail. He couldn't turn me loose and let me round the aliens and his henchman up. So he figured to stall until they could get to safety or he could signal them back.

He put out his light and, poking me every few steps with the rifle, herded me down the trail. I led him clear to the fence, but there he stopped, got cagey. "Didn't the tracks lead over here?"

"I didn't get to follow them that far," I said. "But they show up plain in that little wash just ahead. It's not far."

"All right," he prodded me with the rifle again, "you go on through the fence, then move down a piece and spread the wires for me. But be sure you keep your hands on them wires."

I did so. He stooped gingerly to the gap and laid his gun barrel on the lower wire, as a careful hunter always does. But he kept its muzzle toward my chest. Then he poked his right leg through the gap, ducked his head under quickly, to get his shoulders beneath the wire before I could snap it down on his neck.

I wouldn't have thought of doing such a thing. I waited until he had started to straighten, releasing his gun barrel's pressure on the lower wire a little. Then I bore down on that wire and let it snap up like a rubber band.

It hit the gun's barrel and flung it up about six inches. The rifle went off, and as its bow-wave sang across the badlands, I grabbed the hot barrel, forced it up, swung my right leg,

and kicked him square on the jaw as hard as I could.

It lifted him and dropped him back, belly-flat across the wire. I wrenched the gun from his limp hands, dropped it, grabbed him by the jacket collar, hauled him through, and let him fall in the dirt. I got my own gun out of his pocket and stood over him, waiting.

He stirred, spat, rolled over on his back, and came up slowly on his elbows. His jaw sagged and blood drooled from a bitten tongue. "Dirty," he mumbled through red spit bubbles, "dirty—"

"Sure," I said, "and you a sporting man. You wouldn't do anything worse than beat a guy to death from behind."

He had raised a hand to feel his jaw, but now it slapped back, palm-flat on the sand. "Huh? Beat who to death?"

"Hodge Honepauqh," I said. "The weak link in your chain. The mouthy guy who might have cracked and spilt the beans."

"Hodge dead?" The words came slowly, then he acted fast.

One wild lurch threw him on the rifle I had thrown down. Before I could fall on him, he'd pulled the trigger once; while we struggled he levered in another cartridge and fired a second time. Then he released the gun and went limp again.

He had given Miguel the signal to back-track, of course. Now he knew that Hodge's body had been found and that the sheriff would be there. Now I would have to act fast if I grabbed the aliens before they got back into Mexico.

I grabbed Clyde's legs, and gripping them between my knees, one at a time, like a blacksmith, I wrestled his boots off. I jacked the remaining cartridges from his carbine and threw it as far as I could. "Now if you want to go back to Mexico and hole up," I told him, "go ahead. We got the evidence to extradite you."

"You'll wish I had gone to Mexico," he snarled, "before I'm through settling with you."

I tucked his boots under my arm and headed for my horse.



MOUNTED again, I struck out east up the draw. Near the place where I had covered the bootprints, I threw Clyde's boots into a cactus bed. I holstered my revolver, slid my Winchester 30-30 from its saddle sheath, and moved on, hunched low in the saddle.

A moon that had hung palely in the sky at sunset had brightened up like a floozie after dark; she winked at me behind a shifting curtain of dirty clouds. I watched the arroyo banks which gave a flattened view of the hazy landscape. But the black cardboard shadow of Misery Hill blotted the horizon on my left. And it was from there that I expected

the trouble to come, when I intercepted Miguel and his charges on their return trip.

Suddenly, at a turn in the gully's wide dry bed, a stunted hackberry made a shadow that hung solid against the white sand. There came a hiss of alarm, and then the gob of shadow split like black pottery shattered, and fragments went flying in all directions.

"Alto!" I shouted. "*Menos arriba! Los Federales!*"

That should have stopped them, but it didn't. They had been coached, probably with stories that the Border Patrol would pistol-whip them. They scampered like black beetles, up and over the gully's banks, and I spurred after them.

I hung low in the saddle and looked for Miguel. He had a gun and I didn't mind cracking down on him pointblank if he resisted. But I didn't see him. For a good reason. Miguel played it smart.

He stayed right under the hackberry. He let me ride past and then took a shot at my back.

If his aim had been a fraction to the right, that slug, which was probably hollow-nosed, would have taken most of my chest with it. The thought made me a little mad.

I slid from the saddle with the horse still moving, dropped flat, and went back on my belly. I don't like to shoot from behind my horse unless I have to. He wouldn't do me that way. A nest of prickly pear gave me cover, and I drew a bead on the hackberry shadow. A needle of light crawled on a shifting gun barrel, and I fired.

There was a hoarse grunt of pain and a shot that went wild into the sky. It could be a trick, so I turned back to where my horse had stopped. Something thudded near him and he bolted again.

One of the peons had got the bright idea of throwing a rock at him, and it hadn't been a bad idea at that. By the time I had coaxed him to a standstill and caught the reins, the chaparral between the draw and the fence was as dead and as empty as the cold valleys of the moon.

I rode back to where Miguel had been. He wasn't there. But there was blood. I had hit him all right, though not seriously enough to stop him. I followed his trail to where the crumbling bastions of Misery Hill run down to disintegrate in crumbled rock, and lost him there.

There was plenty of cover on the hill, but the little step-child of the range was isolated. It would take all night to get him alone—if I was lucky. But with help, we could throw a patrol between him and the border, place a guard on the highway, and hold him until morning if necessary. But I would have to act fast.

Luck was with me. I had just wheeled toward the Honepaugh place when two mounted figures rode out from that direction. It was Blake and Donaghue, inspectors in our unit, and they had come out with Gaines Kerby when the news of the killing reached town. Clyde's rifle shots had drawn them out. I gave them the dope on Miguel and they took over while I rode in to report to Kerby and get more help.

I found him at the well arbor with Sheriff Harv Otter, Doc Whetstone, A. A. Carrington, the coroner, and Seth and Angie Honepaugh. Sam Noon had just left, I learned later—carrying a gallon of gas for his stalled car. Clyde Wingo had not showed up.



GAINES KERBY looked quarrelsome, a stiff-necked little bantam in that spruce uniform which never showed a wrinkle even when he slept in it. "What was all the shooting about, Jim?" he asked.

I drew him out of whisper range and let him have the whole story. He did not look pleased. "You'll hear from that business with Wingo," he predicted.

"So what? He was holding a rifle on me. He was using force to prevent my arresting those aliens."

"You couldn't have arrested them in Mexico," Gaines said. "And if you had followed them, Wingo would never have got the drop on you. It's the same old story. You were so busy doing Harv Otter's job that you didn't have time for our business. And now that you're all finished you got nothing on Wingo that will hold water after all."

"Not yet," I admitted, "but if that set of prints in the draw match his boots I will have plenty. And if we hang Hodge's murder around his neck, he'll talk himself blind trying to get the case tried in a Federal instead of a state court."

Gaines pulled at his long underlip. "You talk well, Jim; you'd go places in politics. But—" here he gave me the benefit of his gimlet eyes, "but you had better produce something better than promises this time. Go ahead with your bootprint comparison. Send Wade and Harrison out from headquarters and I will give them a hand with Miguel. I'm going to let you play your hand out like you want to, but I'm telling you, mister, your cards had better be good."

Before I left I spoke to Harv Otter and the doctor. They hadn't learned anything new. The doctor agreed with my guess about the approximate time Hodge had died.

I struck out for the highway and looked for the kid whom I had given the note and the dollar. But I did not see him. When I reached headquarters I learned he hadn't showed up

there either. I hated to think he had taken my dollar and let me down, even if his testimony didn't do anything but give Sam Noon an alibi.

I roused Wade and Harrison from their bunks and gave them Kerby's orders and listened to them curse their jobs while I dug out my kit of material for making casts. I tied it to my saddle and took off again.

I got out to the draw in a half an hour, retrieved Clyde Wingo's boots from the cactus where I had flung them and carried them over to the hidden prints. I made a careful set of prints with them right beside the first set.

I took my sprayer from the kit and, holding it a good yard away, let a fine cloud of shellac fall on the four prints. When this had dried I followed it with a thin coat of oil, prepared my plaster of Paris in a rubber cup, and spooned in a thin layer. I reinforced this with twigs, added more plaster, and smoked a cigarette and fooled around while it hardened.

The sky was cleanswept now, the moon high, and a cool wind out of the juniper canyons fanned my face. A long way off a coyote started his solitary ululation, trying to make me think there were a dozen of him. It was just enough music to make me feel fine.

When the casts were hard enough I packed them carefully for carrying and rode back to town. I took them to a photography shop where the proprietor slept on the premises, woke him up and got them photographed. The two sets of casts looked identical at a glance, both made by square-toed boots of the same size. But I wanted the photographs to make detailed comparisons. The photographer said I could have dry prints the first thing in the morning.

I went back to headquarters and found Gaines Kerby there. The hitch-hiking kid had not showed up, so I wrote him off. Gaines said Clyde Wingo had turned up finally at the Honepaugh house, saying he was going to arrest me for assaulting him and stealing his boots.

"He said," Gaines quoted, "that he urged you to follow the aliens, but that you insisted on fooling around, looking for footprints, and that when he argued with you, you kicked his face."

"You believe it, I guess?"

"No, but you acted like a damned fool anyhow."

They had not found Miguel, but were confident they had him holed up on Misery Hill, where he could be picked up in the morning. They were sure he had not got back to the border, and all cars heading for Tucson had been searched.

I went to bed. But I forgot to put my rabbit's foot under my pillow.

*I gave Inspectors
Blake and Donaghue
the dope on Miguel.*



CHAPTER IV

DEAD END



THE first thing that slapped me in the face next morning was a summons to Gaines Kerby's office. He sat at his desk with an expression that must have curdled his morning coffee. One nicely kept hand with square hard nails lay on a white oblong of bond paper that bore an impressive letterhead. His eyes were on the open window.

Without any preamble he began to recite, in the cheerful tone of a meat-grinder: "Day before yesterday, in a routine raid on a dive,

the El Paso police picked up two aliens equipped with forged photostat birth certificates. Grilled by our boys at Camp Chigas, they said they had come across at Yucca City. Alone and unaided. Presumably they found their forged papers growing on a Joshua-tree. All right. Three more were picked up by the F.B.I. in Tucson yesterday. Same story. They had papers belonging to deceased members of the Mexican community in Phoenix. We will soon be nationally known here as resurrectionists—" He did not laugh. He waited for me to say something, and when I didn't, he swung around and glared. "Well, what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking the thing is bigger than Clyde



Wingo and Hodge Honepaugh," I said. "You can't hatch .45 caliber schemes with .22 caliber brains. That forged papers racket spells system. It's a lucky break that we've got the axe on Clyde; maybe it will get us to the higher ups."

"Have we got the axe on him? What about your bootprint comparisons?"

"Looks good," I said, "but I want to compare details from photographs. I'm going to get them this morning."

"They still haven't got that fellow Miguel you thought you wounded last night."

"I been thinking about him," I said. "He

might have fooled us by heading into town, instead of for Tucson. We ought to check that angle, search Hodge Honepaugh's lumber yard, for one place. And it might not hurt to give Sam Noon's undertaking establishment the eye."

"You think Sam might be in it?"

I said, "An undertaker would be in a position to get hold of the papers of dead men. It's something to think about."

Gaines nodded. "I'll put some men on it. As for your case against Clyde Wingo, Harv Otter thinks he's got that killing pinned on Seth."

"On Seth!" I came half out of my chair. "He's crazy!"

Gaines shrugged. "He says he figured it was Seth as soon as he heard what Seth said to you about killing Hodge with his own hands if Hodge had double-crossed him. And this



Sheriff Harv Otter

morning he got some fresh evidence—he wouldn't say what—that's supposed to cinch it."

"Like hell. They can't do old Seth that way."

"There are some others," Gaines said drily, "who share your opinion. Ranchers, like old Price Bogardus and Dink Campbell, who haven't been to town since they voted for Bryan, are in sniffing the wind, having heard rumors. But Harv is not worried about that, and my money is on the man with the goods."

"I'm going to see Harv." I got up.

"All right," Gaines said, "but get your casts compared and your business wound up because I want you to go to El Paso and check on those aliens the boys at Camp Chigas are holding."

"You going to pull me off this case here?"

"What case here? If you mean Harv Otter's murder case, I guess he'll just have to excuse you."

I went out too mad to answer. I met Harv on the street near the courthouse. A group of ranchers, including the two Gaines had mentioned, were arguing with him. I saw Harv wave one skinny arm and shout, "I won't be dictated to by any faction!" Then he walked away.

I caught up with him and fell in step.

Harv was a man of medium stature, thin and weedy. He had thick, tobacco-colored hair, a scraggly mustache of the same color, and more of the same in shaggy tufts over his eyes and in his ears. He wore the habitual expression of an old and quarrelsome dog. "That bunch," he kept mumbling now, "still think they can run this country like they did when old Seth was king."

"They haven't heard about Sam Noon. Did you tell them?"

Harv stopped and brought his mean bright eyes to full focus on my face. "There are some people," he said, "who say Sam Noon owns me. But they don't say it to my face. Not without a fight!" He started shucking off his burlap-colored coat that always had its sagging pockets stuffed with papers. He was about half my size.

"Forget it, Harv," I said. "What I want to know is: what have you got on Seth? Or is it a state secret?"

"No secret," he snapped. "The old man done it. Can't say I blame him, Hodge being what he was. Still, the law says you can't do it, and I won't shut my eyes in a murder case for Seth, or any man!"

"Or Sam Noon?"

"Or Sam Noon." He faced me level-eyed.

"O.K. Glad to hear it, Harv. Now this proof?"



HARV got an end of his mustache between his teeth and gave it a good chew. "You made a pretty good start on that case, Jim," he said, "only you got everything backwards—about them tracks, I mean. Lookee. I'm going out there in about an hour. You come out and I'll show you what I mean." He turned and hurried off.

I got my prints from the photographer, carried them back to headquarters and went into the barracks by the back way, avoiding Gaines Kerby's office. I tacked the prints to a drawing board, got a ruler and a small reading lens, and sat down to study them. And suddenly I began to feel very funny in my stomach.

On the cast from the right bootprint of the set I called the "ghost prints," I had already noticed a small indentation which did not appear on any of the others. I had thought it might have been caused by air bubbles or the twigs I had inserted in the plaster. Now I did not think so. Because I saw something else.

The hard high heel of a cowboy boot is one of the best places to spot peculiarities. The leather soon wears down there, leaving the heads of the nails like little islands. The spacing of these is very characteristic, especially if they are bench-made boots. It did not

take me long to find that the spacings did not match the ones on Clyde's boots at all. Clyde's boots simply had not made those prints in the dry wash, and my case against him was as flat as a blown-out tire.

I tried to comfort myself with that peculiar mark from the print of what must have been the killer's boot. But it didn't help much. It might have been anybody's boot, for all I knew. It was an odd little scar on an otherwise smooth sole, that was U-shaped and about three-quarters of an inch high. It was too near the toe to have been made by habitual pressure on a car starter, or anything like that. I couldn't imagine what could have made it.

Suddenly, from up forward, I heard the door of Gaines' office opening. I pulled my photographs quickly off the board and ducked out with them to the stables. I waited there for about ten minutes and then saddled my horse and rode away.

I headed out of town but with no definite destination. What I wanted was a good hole to crawl into. What I found was the dead body of the road kid, the dirty-faced little gamin who had started in with the dollar bill and my note the night before.

He lay in the brush at the bottom of the embankment where the highway crossed the bridge about two miles from town. He lay on his side, looking even smaller than he had before. His hands were outflung, one of them clenched; his thin face was cushioned on the reddish gravel; his dirty blanket-roll lay beside him. Blood, black and dry, was all over the back of his shaggy head. He had been dead a long time.

I got down on my knees beside him and suddenly, on the dead hot silence, I heard the ticking of his watch, that watch he had been so proud of, and which had outlasted him. I left it where it was and felt in his pockets for the note I had given him. The wadded dollar bill was there, but the note was gone.

The killer had taken it. That told me something.

But who could have killed him? Sam Noon had driven along this highway after he had left the Honepaugh house. But Sam would not have killed the one person who could give him an ironclad alibi in Hodge Honepaugh's murder. And even though he might have put the kid's fire out to prevent confusing the alien-runner's signals, he would not have killed the kid over that.

Then who? Naturally I thought of Clyde Wingo, and of the man Miguel whom I had wounded. Miguel, a desperate fugitive and killer, might have met the kid. But why murder him? The same question applied to Clyde. But—

Put the two together and you might have something. Clyde Wingo had not showed up at the Honepaugh house until long after our encounter. Meanwhile he might have circled about and made contact with his wounded henchman, Miguel, who might have headed into Yucca City instead of toward Tucson. And if they had stopped to discuss plans, on or near the highway, the kid, coming along in the dark in his thin-soled shoes might have walked up on them, might have overheard—too much. Add to that the fact that the boy was carrying a note from me, indicating I wanted him for a witness to something, and you had enough to explain it.

I straightened up with my fists clenched and a curse between my teeth. The note was the thing that had done it. Ironically, the kid got his ambition to serve in the Border Patrol after all. It was the commission I had given him that had been his death warrant. And now Gaines Kerby was going to send me off to El Paso.

He was like hell.

I unpinned my badge and stared at it a moment, a nice-looking *simbola*, as the Mexicans say, a shiny metal shield with a big eagle crouched atop and a small circle in the center and the words: *Inspector, U. S. Border Patrol, Department of Justice*. I liked it and I had been proud to wear it, but I was not going to wear it any more. As Gaines Kerby had said sarcastically, it cramped my style. Now my arms were going to be free to go after whoever killed this boy, whether he was a violator of the immigration laws or not.

On a sheet torn from my notebook, I scribbled: *Do not disturb. By order of the Border Patrol*, and I pinned it to the boy's shirt with my badge. I looked at him a moment and hoped he could see it, and then I unrolled his dirty blanket and covered him, and weighted it down with rocks. Then I laid some brush over him again. I would have to report it to Harv Otter, but I would find out a few things for myself first.



I GOT back on the highway and rode past the place where Sam's car had been parked. I found the spot, a half mile farther on, where Sam had put the boy's fire out.

It was in a swag where some old cedar posts from a torn-down fence had been piled. There were half-burned posts in the bed of ashes where the fire had been stomped out. It confirmed that part of the kid's story but didn't give me anything else.

I figured that Harv Otter would be out at the Honepaugh place by now, so I rode there. I found him under the old well arbor with his deputy, Luke Dixon. They were looking at something lying on the brick-flagged floor. It

was a pair of engineer's field-boots, tied with a piece of wire to a rusty automobile spring leaf. You could see that the boots had been wet but were dry now.

"What you got?" I asked.

"The evidence," Harv said, "that I was talking about. The murder weapon and the boots. They both came out of the well."

I squatted down and looked at the boots. "If those aren't Clyde Wingo's boots, I'll eat them," I said. "I remember that fancy buckle on the strap across the instep."

Harv nodded. "Shore. Clyde admits they're his, says they were stolen. And I think that double set of tracks was made by them all right. Anyhow, the trail both ways was made by the same boots. So, if Clyde was wearing them, and if Clyde was the killer, I ask you: how did they get here in the well?"

I straightened, scratching my head. That was it, of course. I saw now what Harv had meant by saying I had the picture backwards. I remembered something else too, a contradiction which had occurred to me, but which I had dismissed after I found Clyde at the end of the trail.

Harv went on, "You never thought of fishing in the well, Jim, because you assumed that the set of tracks came from the border first, and went back to the border afterwards. Whereas, they went to the border first, and then came back here."

"You're as right as rain, Harv," I admitted. "I should have got it. For one thing it was a little too much of a coincidence that the second line of tracks never crossed the first one. That would have given the truth away."

"Shore. And the whole thing was done to confuse us on that—makes us think that the killer had got away."

"Right. And I should have figured it out myself. Because when I followed the trail to the border, I noticed how it swung in a gradual arc to the left as soon as the Dos Piedras peaks were too low for a man afoot to be guided by them. But as soon as they reappeared, the trail straightened and went toward them again. That should have told me that the trail I was following—the one the led toward the border—had been made first."

"Yeah. Because on his second trip, the man hadn't used no landmarks, had just followed the trail he had already made. And if the trail coming from the border had been made first, it would have been straight, since Misery Hill is in plain view all the time. . ."

Harv paused to fish out his can of Copenhagen snuff and load his underlip. "And now I reckon you see the implications?"

I nodded. "The trail of the killer who wore those boots started here and ended here. But since Clyde was at the other end of the trail, Clyde couldn't have made it."



. . . a pair of engineer's field-boots, tied to a rusty automobile spring leaf.

"Check. And there were no other trails leading out of here. I made sure of that the first thing I got here last night. My deputies went clean around the mesa. Nobody could have got out of here without wings. So one of the people here killed Hodge. You or Sam Noon or Angie or Seth. And whoever did had Clyde Wingo's boots, and made the false trail that led to Clyde."

"To frame him? In that case the person must have known where he would be."

"That seems obvious. And I'll point out that if Seth had got onto Hodge and Clyde's game, he'd have known."

"But when the boots were found, it would clear Clyde—just as it has done."

"The boots weren't going to be found. Nobody was going to look for them here. Everybody was going to assume that the killer had come from the border and had gone back to the border—just as you thought. And when Clyde was found over there, it would be remembered that he owned some engineer's boots, like the ones that made the tracks. And when he couldn't produce them, it would be assumed he had hidden or destroyed them."

"All right. You still haven't proved it was Seth."

"Well, let's see. Did you kill Hodge?"

"No."

"And didn't Seth tell you he'd kill Hodge with his own hands if Hodge was using his place for alien-running?"

"It was a foolish, unguarded remark."

"Maybe. But old Seth's got a reputation for taking the law into his own hands. An old Spartan. He could have got hold of Clyde's

boots easy enough. And even though his eyes are bad, he could have made that walk across familiar country easy too."

"I guess so. . ." Something was pecking at my mind like a chick not quite able to break his shell.

"Or do you think it was Angie?"

I shook my head. "I don't think she could have made the trail, kept up that long stride uniformly for two miles."

"No. And she may not have seen Seth when he did it, being busy in the kitchen, and with the windows shaded by trees."

"Well, there's still Sam Noon," I ventured. I did not think anyone but I knew of that alibi the kid had given Sam. "Sam might have got here earlier than he said. He might have killed Hodge as soon as Hodge came in, then made the tracks to the border and back, then appeared at the house, pretending he had just come. Sam could be in this alien-running game himself. With things going bad, he may have wanted to liquidate and get rid of Hodge and Clyde too. And he would have known where Clyde would be at that time."

"Sorry to disappoint you," Harv said, "but Sam's got an alibi. As I was coming out here last night, having heard the story from Angie, I met a kid hitch-hiking on the road and thought to ask him about Sam's car. It just happened he had seen Sam stop—at exactly five minutes to eight. Hodge was already dead by then."

Well, I knew that. I asked, "Where did you meet the kid?"

"On the highway, 'bout a mile this side of the bridge."

And a mile farther, the kid had been left dead.

"Have you arrested Seth?" I asked.

"No, but I'll have to. And he's clammed up—won't talk."



I FROWNED over that and left him and went into the house. The developments this morning had not simply disarmed me, they had stripped me naked and yanked the ground from under me. I had only one card to play now. If I could arouse Seth to make a fight, we could get the old-timers behind us and maybe sweep Sam's gang out of office before the case could come to trial. Otherwise there wasn't anything—

Nobody was around when I got to the front door, so I walked on in. I found old Seth in his dim room with the blinds drawn, a tired old ghost, in the same chair he had occupied last night. Again the chessboard was in front of him and the pieces all laid out, with no move made. I stopped and looked at the neat array of little ivory soldiers and asked, "Is there going to be a fight this time?"

"Eh?" Seth looked up as if he hadn't seen me and still didn't—quite. "Oh, hello, Silvers."

"You didn't answer my question," I said. "They are getting ready to really stomp you this time, Seth. And the hell of it is, I think Harv Otter is honest about it. But there's dirty work behind it, all the same."

"Sure," Seth said. "You got any more ideas?"

"I've had a lot of ideas," I said. "But there's only one that's any good now."

"What's that?"

"Come out shooting," I said. "Shoot the works. You got nothing to lose. You haven't even got Hodge to protect any longer . . ."

I paused, seeing a little interest kindle in his dead old eyes. "You've got friends," I said. "Some of them are in town now. But they can't help you if you won't help yourself. You've got to lay your cards on the table first. Tell the whole story of the axe Sam Noon has held over your head for ten years, admit it was Hodge you were shielding—"

He thought that over, licking his dry, cracked lips. "But suppose," he asked in a thin whisper, "I wasn't shielding Hodge?"

It was a belly-punch and it shook me. He hadn't contradicted my theory before; I had taken his silence as a tacit admission.

"Then," I said, "let the chips fall where—"

I stopped, watching a sudden, ugly miracle in his face. For a moment, while I had talked, life had flowed into him like sap into a wilted plant; his lean nostrils had whiffed the scent of battle like an old war-horse. Now, in an instant, it was gone, the blood ebbing, the very flesh seeming to disintegrate.

I hadn't heard a sound, but I turned toward the door on which his glazed eyes were focused. Angie Honepaugh was standing there. Then I knew.

I got up and walked toward her and she drew back a little.

"Pa," she began, "Mr. Otter wants to see—"

I took hold of her wrist. "Harv can wait," I said. I drew her into the room and shut the door and slid the iron bolt. It was as dark as a tomb now, but I thought it was better that way. "Angie," I said in a low tone, "why have you let your father ruin himself? It was you that shot Tom Eckhart ten years ago, wasn't it?"

CHAPTER V

THE CROOKED MILE



IN THE silence old Seth's voice rang out, sharp and peremptory, "Angie! Not a word!"

I heard her take a deep breath. The big clock ticked in the semi-darkness. When she spoke her voice was pitched to a whisper.

"Yes . . . and I'm going to talk now. I couldn't help it then. I was only seventeen, Pa locked me up and threatened me with a whip . . . and then, well, he'd made the deal with Sam Noon, and there was nothing I could do . . ."

"But you were just a kid," I said. "An older man was annoying you and you shot him. They wouldn't have done anything to you."

"No," she said, "only that wasn't it. You see, Tom and I, well . . . anyhow, I wanted Tom to marry me and he wouldn't, and I meant to scare him, only the gun went off, Pa's gun, and . . ."

"Angle!"

But the cat was out of the bag now, and my last hope went glimmering. I had found the skeleton in the closet all right, but it would have to stay there. Men of Seth's breed never let that sort of skeleton out, no matter what. Seth would never defy Sam Noon as long as Sam held that secret over him. I let the dead issue lie, asked her, "Did you know Clyde Wingo and Hodge were running an alien underground through here?"

She hesitated a moment, then answered, "Yes, I knew—how could I help knowing? But I had to help them keep Pa from finding out, because if he had found out he'd have—" She stopped, frightened.

"Killed Hodge? Well, he didn't. But in order to save him from having it pinned on him, you may have to tell the truth—about what Hodge and Clyde were doing. Will you do that?"

"I would," she said, "if it would do any good. I'm through with Clyde now. If he had any manhood, he'd tell it himself, for my sake, to save Pa. But it wouldn't help for me to tell it. Clyde could maybe help get the man who killed Hodge. I couldn't; I don't know anything about that. And just to say Hodge was double-crossing Pa would just give Pa a motive for having killed him."

She was right; she was right as rain.

I said, "You didn't by any chance kill Hodge yourself?"

She just said, "No," but I believed her.

I turned and unbolted the door and went out. In the hall Harv Otter and a deputy passed me, going toward Seth's room. I stepped into the living room and stopped. Sam Noon and Gaines Kerby were seated in chairs facing each other near the fireplace. They looked like two enemy dogs thrown into the same pound wagon.

Gaines turned to me and his sea-gull eyes, that never missed anything, went straight to my blouse front. "Where's your badge?"

I was feeling bad. I had just taken some body blows. Gaines' tone was like a whip on old sores. "My badge," I said, "is lying beside the road near the bridge between here and town. I used it as a posthumous award for a friend who had guts enough to help us, but

whom we did not have the power or prestige to protect."

It was a pompous smart-aleck speech, but I was mad. Gaines stiffened and swallowed and Sam Noon got up, dusted his hands, and left, like a neighbor kid, when his pal is going to get a licking.

Gaines let him get out of hearing, and then said, tightly, "You might have reported to me about that bootprint comparison."

"I dodged you," I said, "because it was no good."

Gaines half rose on crooked arms. "You mean the boots were not Clyde Wingo's? You mean you let that bunch of aliens get away and made an all-round fool of yourself and the service—all for nothing?"

"That's about the size of it, sir."

He just sat back in his chair and said, "Well, I will be damned." He thought that over a minute. When he spoke again, his tone was curt and impersonal, as if I had become a worm too negligible even to be stepped on. "Go back to headquarters," he said, "and pack your bag and catch the three o'clock plane for El Paso. Check on those prisoners there and give me a report by telephone tonight."

Then he got up, flicked some non-existent dust from his sleeve, and started out without even glancing at me.

"Wait a minute, Chief," I said, "I can't go."

That stopped him—like a brick wall. "What do you mean you can't go?" he rasped. "Do you think you're in the Boy Scouts?"

"I doubt if they'd take me," I said, and grinned sourly. "But since my year of probation is about up, I'm asking to be suspended now. I'll check my badge in as soon as I can go and get it."

He was as red as a turkey-gobbler; a ten-penny nail would have snapped between his teeth like a match-stem. "I'll get your badge myself," he said. "You can just check your gun in right now."

Well, I had forgotten about the gun. It was the government issue revolver. I never had bought myself an automatic, like a lot of the boys did. I hated to give the old gun up. But I unstrapped my harness and handed him the whole works and turned and walked out.



I GOT to the door and looked up and Sam Noon was standing in the hall, rolling an unlit cigar around with his lips. "Feel a little hot, Jim?" he asked. "Let's take a walk and cool off."

I started to brush him off with a "go-to-hell," but then I stopped and squinted at his bland, smiling face, all friendly and unruffled, and instead, I grinned too.

"Not a bad idea, Sam," I said. "Let's go."

I looked back over my shoulder at Gaines

Kerby, and the words I thought I saw forming on his soundless lips would not do to print.

"It doesn't pay," said Sam Noon unctuously, as we strolled out onto the grounds, "to lose your temper. It's one little defect I've noticed in you, Jim. Aside from that, you are all wool and a yard wide, for my money."

I thought he might better have left that last phrase off.

"Thanks, Sam," I told him.



"Feel a little hot, Jim?" Sam asked.
"Let's take a walk and cool off."

"Only," he added, "you seem to have the foolish notion that people are going to appreciate a tough, honest, courageous man who stays in a two-bit job all his life. But maybe you're beginning to learn." We had got to the gate by now. "Let's stroll out across the desert a piece," he suggested. "I like the sun and the silence."

I knew he liked the silence. He had a formula for private discussions which was so well-known that it was a joke. Sam did not trust conference rooms, with keyholes, transoms, and cracks. He liked at least an acre of air around him when he discussed a deal. His "take a walk" invitations had started the wisecracks about the men who walked the crooked mile with him.

For a long time we just strolled. This, I gathered, was the conditioning process. He let you commune with yourself for a bit and wonder what he was going to say.

It was a pretty day, hot but with a little breeze, and the great cloud masses hung over the desert like bunches of pearl-colored grapes. It was the kind of day you remember after you have left the desert which you always cursed while you were there.

We strolled and I smoked and Sam chewed his cigar. We would drift apart and then come back together again. It was quite a while before I noticed that whenever we drifted apart, it was always I who swung his way to get in step again. Little observations like that can bother you sometimes—unflattering. Sam would veer to the left and then I would go to the left too. He never seemed to notice.

We must have walked a mile in silence.

"How would you like to be chief-of-police in Yucca City, Jim?"

Well, he knew how to come to the point when he had plenty of privacy. "I've been considering running for the job," I said cagily, "but I never expected your support."

"That was bad judgment, Jim," he said, "because you and I could work together fine. You can have the job if you want it."

"What about Clyde Wingo?" I asked.

He took out his chewed cigar and looked at it critically. "Clyde," he said, "is out anyhow. Clyde is a fool. A fool is of no use to me. A man with no more sense than to get himself involved in alien-running with a loose-mouthed jackass like Hodge Honepaugh deserves what he gets."

"So you're throwing Clyde to the wolves?"

"Me throwing him?" he shrugged. "He's thrown himself. Even if you haven't got the proof yet, the Border Patrol will nail him on that alien-running business sooner or later."

"I didn't mean that. I mean the murder of Hodge."

"Oh, that . . ." Sam gave some attention to

his cigar again. I didn't think he'd heard me admit to Gaines that my evidence against Clyde was no good. Apparently he hadn't. He went on: "Well, now, I wanted to speak to you about that. I understand you've got some sort of evidence against Clyde, but I suggest you just forget it—I mean, if we're going along together. It's not that I give a damn about Clyde, but having a man I have supported tried for murder wouldn't help me—us—as you can see."

"So," I said, "you offer me Clyde's job in exchange for scuttling this evidence against Clyde in Hodge's murder?"

"You have a blunt, ugly way of putting things, Jim," he complained. "What did you think of Hodge Honepaugh, anyhow?"

"Just a rat of a minor breed."

"Right. So if Clyde did kill him, he just killed a rat."

"The law don't look at it that way."

"Oh, the law . . ." Sam said. "But actually Clyde wouldn't escape punishment. Losing his job, and the alien-running charge, that would finish him."

"And I would become your cat's-paw?"

"You keep talking that way," Sam said. "If I wanted a crook in my office, why would I ask you? If you get in, you'll be the boss in your department, won't you? If you didn't like my advice, couldn't you just tell me to go to hell?"



I HAD to grin at that. He was shrewd. And confident. He was actually goading me to try out what was in my mind, tempting me to make the first false step that would give him a hold on me—the destruction of that evidence.

But it was tempting. The evidence against Clyde was no good anyhow. And what I could do with that police-chief job was plenty. I could clean up this local rat's-nest from top to bottom, help Gaines make his post the most efficient on the border, save old Seth. And the first time Sam opened his mouth to me, I would kick him across the plaza. Or I thought I would.

I counted more unhatched chickens in that half-minute than ever before in my life. And Sam watched me, knowing it, knowing that others probably had had the same bright idea. And then I stopped and just idly glanced back in the direction from which we had come, and I saw the trail we had made, and it was the answer to why Sam was so sure of himself.

We had started walking straight out from the Honepaugh grounds, but we had kept swinging in a steady arc, until now we were almost to the highway. Two sets of tracks, as crooked as a beggar's stick. Sam always bending imperceptibly toward the left, me following—

"Well, what's the answer?" Sam was getting impatient.

I nodded at the arc our trail made on the sand. "There it is, Sam," I said, "the crooked mile, the handwriting on the wall. A man can't go with you and go straight, even when he thinks he's doing it."

Sam colored; it was the first time I had seen him really mad.

"I get damned tired of that catch-phrase," he said. "You'd think, by God, I had corrupted every man in this county. But you're a fool to let such twaddle influence you. You got to learn to be a realist—live by facts, not symbols."

"How do you mean, Sam?"

"Why, like this. You got an important decision to make and you act like an old hag with a dream book, or the old Romans who called it an omen if a bird flew from the left. You know that trail of tracks don't mean anything—actually. I simply swing to the left when I walk for the simple reason that my right eye is blind. A man, not steering by a landmark or compass, is always governed by his stronger eye, which makes him veer in that direction. But here you are talking as if it was a sign from heaven."

I guess I did act a little like a man in a trance. My voice had a far-away sound even to me, when I asked, idly, "Is that a scientific fact—about a man going in the direction of his stronger eye?"

"Sure. Ask any oculist . . . But let's stick to our point. I made you an offer. I want a straight-out answer."

I was sorry I couldn't give him one just then. I was trying to sort out a lot of crowding thoughts and get some answers for myself. One I had got was: it was not evidence against Clyde Wingo that Sam was trying to get destroyed. I said, "Let's walk on while I think it over."

I started toward the highway and Sam shrugged and fell in step. It was only a few hundred yards to the highway bridge now and suddenly Sam balked. "Where the hell are you going?"

"Only a little farther. I want to show you something."

"Show me what?"

"A man," I said, "who hewed to a straight line, even if it cost him his life."

"You talk like a nut," Sam said, but he followed.

I led the way down into the gully and pulled the brush and the dirty blanket away, and there the kid lay, just as I had left him, the note still pinned to his shirt with my badge.



SAM'S face was hard and opaque as a rock. "Your badge?" was all he said.

I nodded. "He'd walked a long way, so I let him rest."

"Why," Sam said, stooping a little, "I believe

that's a kid I met on the highway last evening—put out a fire he had started."

"He's the one."

"You talked to him?" Sam asked.

"I did. It just happens he gave you an airtight alibi for the murder of Hodge Honepaugh."

"Did he now?" Sam asked. His color was high; it might have been just the heat.

"Yes," I said, "he was positive you stopped on the highway at exactly five to eight. Hodge was already dead by then."

"Hm," Sam said. "I wonder who killed him?"

"Somebody," I said, "who met him last night, hiking in with a note from me. You passed here on your way to town—"

"Me? But I wouldn't have killed my alibi—"

"The alibi was no good," I said. "And you didn't know what he'd said. All you knew was that he had seen you stop at a certain time."

"Well, if that was five to eight, as he said—"

"But it wasn't . . ." I looked at him carefully and could not see a sign of a gun anywhere. I stooped quickly and pulled the kid's watch from his pocket. I glanced at it and caught my breath, because I had been gambling on a hunch. Sam watched me tensely.

"Well, what time is it?"

"It's later than you think, Sam." I thrust the

watch into my blouse pocket. "Just now, when I looked back at that trail," I told him, "it came to me that you were the one who killed Hodge last night. But there was the testimony of this kid still in my way—"

"What's our trail got to do with it?"

"You gave me that answer yourself," I said, "when you told me that a man walking without a landmark, veers in the direction of his strongest eye."

"Oh, hell," Sam said, "and because that trail of tracks you found across the desert last night veered to the left, just as the trail I made just now veers to the left, you think that adds up to proof that I killed Hodge?" He laughed. "Why anybody's trail might have accidentally swung that way."

"Sure," I said. "But Harv has narrowed the suspects in this case down to you and Seth."

"All right. Seth's eyes are notoriously bad."

"So bad," I said, "that he wears special-built glasses with one lens larger—to equalize what little vision he's got. What he sees, he sees straight. Besides that, he only sees things near at hand. If he had made that trail he'd have followed nearby, familiar landmarks, and would probably have walked it straight. Even if he hadn't he would not have righted his course—as you did—just at the place where the vanished peaks came back into view, because old Seth

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wouldn't have been able to see those hazy peaks at all."

Sam's lips formed a straight bloodless line. "Neat theorizing. But what have you got to back it up. Why should I kill Hodge?"

"You've just been telling me," I said, "what a fool Clyde was to throw in with a loose-mouthed fellow like Hodge. But suppose you're in the alien-running racket with Clyde yourself. Then what threatens him, threatens you—I mean Hodge's likelihood of spilling the beans under pressure. And if you kill Hodge to keep him quiet, why not frame Clyde for the crime, since you want to cut loose from him too?"

"But would I frame Clyde and then try to get you to ditch that evidence?"

"It wasn't evidence against Clyde you were worrying about. It was evidence against yourself. You didn't expect me to get prints of the boots you were carrying. But I think you've guessed I did. Also, by getting rid of that evidence you could pretend to Clyde that you had saved him from a murder rap—thereby insuring that he wouldn't drag you into it when we nab him on the alien-smuggling charge."

Sam's face was still rock-like, but now it was like red granite drenched with rain. "You haven't disposed of this kid's evidence about the time I stopped on the highway," he said.

"I'm coming to that. I worked it out in my mind while we walked this last quarter-mile. I recalled everything the kid had said—how he hadn't eaten since he'd left a jerk town the other side of El Paso, how he'd come through El Paso without stopping. Then it came to me that he had failed to do something a traveler always does when he comes through El Paso traveling west—

"Got it now? He didn't set his watch to Mountain time. When he saw you stop on the highway there, it was five to eight all right by his watch—by Central time. But actually, by our time, Mountain time, it was only five to seven. The gave you an extra hour, which was all the time you needed to get to the Honepaugh house, wait for Hodge, kill him when he came in, and then set the stage with that false trail before showing up and pretending you had just come. And here—" I added, pulling the watch out, "is the proof of it."



HE DIDN'T even look at the watch—he knew what it said. His single eye, watery with sweat, bored into my face. "You could have set that watch back. It won't hold in court."

I glanced down at the boy's dead face, where flies were beginning to buzz, and I asked, "Who in hell said anything about court?" and I swung a haymaker that knocked him flat on the rocky ground.

I let him stagger to his knees and then I hit him again. His face began to bleed and as he

made another try, I grabbed his right leg, and raised it, and stared at the sole of his boot.

There it was—the little U-shaped mark on the leather near the toe, which matched the indentation in the cast I had made.

"Here's the pay-off, Sam," I said, "since you want to get technical about court evidence. You should have been more careful when you stomped out that kid's fire to avoid confusing your alien-runners. Or at least you should have thrown away those boots, with a clear brand, left by a hot staple nail from one of those burning posts."

With a quick jerk, Sam tore his foot from my grasp. I thought he meant to kick me and stepped sideways, and then I saw the little gun in his hand. I might have known he didn't go unarmed, as he boasted. He was just smart enough to make you think so. It was a deringer, a sleeve-gun, and it was deadly at that range . . .

A lot of clever dodges must have gone through my mind while I stood there like Lot's wife, turned to salt, but if so, I forgot what they were. I knew he was going to shoot and it was a cinch I was going to get hit, and the best I could hope for was that it wouldn't be mortal. A dog could have done what I did, and probably would have—only better. I threw myself on him like a kid going off a spring-board.

The little gun spat like a firecracker and something hot slapped my left side. I tried to fall square on him but rolled to the right and red dust was all around me, and I felt sick, and tried to straighten myself and fall on him again. And only then did I begin to wonder why such a little gun had caused such a loud echo.

Then, out of the dust where Sam Noon lay, strangely still, there loomed a pair of shiny cavalry boots, and since there is only one pair of boots that shiny in Yucca County, I knew, without looking up, that they belonged to Gaines Kerby.

"Get a nibble of this," he was saying next, and the cool touch of a flask was on my lips, and in my throat the lifting sting of brandy. Then I raised up enough to see the black hole in the middle of Sam Noon's forehead, and remembered the score Gaines had made at the last pistol meet.

"Take it easy, son," Gaines said, "and save your breath. I stopped by here to see what you meant by that theatrical speech about where your badge was, and when I saw you and Sam heading here, I parked my horse under the bridge and watched. Thought you might want a witness to make your partnership legal."

"Never mind that. Was what you heard enough?"

"I think so, if that mark you're talking about is on his boot and on the cast you made. Also we got some more—for our end of it. The boys

Then I saw the little gun in his hand. . . It was a derringer, a sleeve-gun, and deadly at that range.



found Miguel in Sam's undertaking morgue—that was your guess. And with Sam dead, Miguel will be so anxious to sing that they'll sign him for the Metropolitan Opera before he's done. And that will take care of Clyde Wingo."

"Miguel," I said, "was probably picked up by Sam last night. He was probably with Sam when they came on this kid carrying my note and killed him."

Gaines nodded. "Not a nice man, Sam—the world won't miss him. Of course I aimed as I did to save you, but . . . Well, can you make it to the horse now?"

I said I could and I had to grin at Gaines. The little banty was as cool as a cucumber, though he'd just shot a man dead. It reminded me that a man who always hews to the line has the advantage of always knowing where he stands. He shoots for keeps and wastes no

worry afterwards. There's something to be said for that angle.

We had got a clean handkerchief inside my bloody blouse and stanching the bleeding, and my more important machinery didn't seem to be damaged. "Well," Gaines said, "I'll have to send somebody else to El Paso, I guess, while you get a nice rest in a hospital. Confound you for a gold-bricker anyhow. I believe you got yourself shot on purpose."

I liked him for that. It meant he was not going to make me eat any crow in order to stay in the service. He was just going to forget my flare-up. He knew I wouldn't trade my forest-green breeches with the nice blue stripe for the shiniest-seated pair of police-chief pants in the country.

"What I like about you, Chief," I said, "is the way we always understand each other."

THE

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PETER STEVENS



CAPE TOWN BLIGHTER

By GEOFFREY MAJOR



I WAS lounging in the quarters of the Stengah Club of Bulawayo with my riding-booted feet propped up on the table. This is ordinarily a privilege reserved to members over fifty and to the Grand Shifter, but there were only four of us present and we were all rather irreligious in such matters.

For those of you who may not know Bulawayo's Stengah Club, in Southern Rhodesia, I should say that it is a collection of gentlemen who, having lived in India (generally as civil servants or army officers) during some previous period in their lives, now reside in or near Bulawayo; and who band together once or twice a week to exchange sighs and stories concerning the hot and uncomfortable land which is to them the only Old Country.

(I never think of the old club without being reminded of Jenkins, a small earnest bespectacled man, who struck us all dumb one afternoon by asking me, in a perfectly serious tone, what a chota-hazri was, and whether one ate it or sat upon it! Since then we have been much more strict with the Entrance Examination, though we have allowed Jenkins to remain with us. I think it's because he is so unruffled and serious, and makes us a fine contrast.)

Well, on this particular occasion, we had been chatting idly of the supernatural and from that chameleon subject had gone on to speak of frights, practical jokes and that sort of thing.

Griff Falconer was drinking Scotch and so was I, while St. Xavier and young Jack Martyn were endeavoring with brandy pegs to wet down the dust of Bulawayo that had gathered in their throats; four cheroots of the real old Indian variety were going strong. It was a splendid, lazy summer afternoon in late October.

"I say, you chaps," St. Xavier burst out suddenly, "did any of you ever know old Teddie MacLagan of the Guides?"

"I fancy I met him once up at the Pass," said Falconer indistinctly, tearing off loose strips of wrapper from his cheroot with his teeth.

The Stengah Club is a collection of gentlemen who have lived in India, and who band together once or twice a week to exchange sighs and stories.

"You very well may have, we were up there together for donkey's years," agreed St. Xavier. (He was a tall, thinnish, dark fellow, who walked and rode with an odd sideways twist to his shoulders because of an old wound.) "Well, I've just been thinking of a dashed funny thing that happened to Teddie and me at Cape Town about four years ago."

"Oh, come, Saint X," protested Martyn amiably. "You know the rule—no stories, except they be of India or Home."

"Oh, hell. This is quite a story, y'know. And there are only the four of us here."

"Forestier's a charter member. He'd squeal," said Martyn.

"I would not," I said hotly. "What am I, a slimy cad? Let's have the Cape Town tale, Saint X."

"I shouldn't mind hearing it, either." Falconer murmured. "After all, we're all livin' in Africa now, ain't we? No harm that I see in a good African story now and again. Let 'er rip, Saint X."

St. Xavier took a sip at his brandy peg and proceeded to let 'er rip as requested.



YOU all know how I was crooked at the Pass in the skirmish with Umeer Khan; well, Teddie MacLagan got his then too, in the usual "canter down some dark defile." We were both certified decidedly not *bon pour le service* (in fact each of us was told he'd never ride again, though we proved 'em wrong) and shipped off to recuperate and twiddle our thumbs wherever we chose to go.

I went to Cape Town, because I'd relatives there, and oddly enough I met Teddie the first time I strolled along the Promenade. He was looking drawn and white and shaky, and I suppose I was no beauty myself, but we waved our canes at each other and bawled some delighted profanity that must have sadly shocked the good promenaders. We tottered into each other's arms like the well-known longlost. I was awfully bucked up to see him.

After that we used to take our constitutions together, arm-in-arm, for we had always been great pals; and we roamed down Adderley Street and sat in Stuttaford's drinking tea, took buses to Three Anchor Bay and all the jolly suburbs, and later, when my leg and his back were mending, we even went out to Hout Bay and shot a couple of cautious holes of golf. And it was on the golf course that Teddie and I met Isa Galloway.

How can I describe her to a soulless pack of misogynists like you? She was a dream of sheer loveliness. Her brow was like the snow-drift, her throat was like the swan, her face it was the fairest that e'er these eyes looked on. Aye, a bonnie Scotch lass, Isa Galloway . . .

On the way home Teddie kept telling me

how much he loved her, and I persistently reminded him that I was older and had more experience than he—and could thus assure him that I was far more deeply in love with her than he could ever possibly be.

We were having quite a good-natured row over it when Teddie sobered and said, "Did you notice the look in her eyes, Saint X?"

I said I had noticed a curious, tense look in her bright blue eyes.

"Almost as though she were frightened of something."

I agreed that Isa had seemed to be apprehensive of several things, including some passing bumblebees and the horrid face of my dear friend, Teddie MacLagan.

"Seriously, Saint X. She's in trouble."

I scoffed. "It was merely the shattering experience of meeting you and me for the first time, and together, too."

He requested me not to play the silly ass. "We've got to find out what it is, and step on it."

"Squash its nasty face in," I agreed.

We met it the very next time we saw Miss Isa Galloway.

It was at Cleghorn's, where we'd gone to have coffee; and it was sitting with our goddess at a table, swilling tea and grunting in her beautiful ear; its stubby paws, their backs covered with long dark hair, placed flat on the table before it as though it would spring at her throat. Its name was Fall-Swayne, said Isa as we came up and paid her our homage.

"How d'you do, Mister Foul-Swine," said old Teddie levelly, taking one of the hairy paws in a gingerly fashion and dropping it at once, as though he had picked up something dirty by mistake.

"Swayne, sir, Fall-Swayne," grumbled the creature. Was it a plea for assistance, mingled with gratitude for even this small insult to her gross companion, that lit the eyes of Miss Galloway? We thought so when we discussed it at our own table. And we were certain of it later, when, encountering the girl outside and alone, Teddie said tenderly, "Look here, Miss Galloway, could we do you any sort of favor?" and, her ethereal face lined and twisted, the lovely girl exclaimed swiftly, "Oh, no, nothing, thank you! Nothing at all!"

We exchanged glances. "I could chuck this Foul-Swine into the sea if he's bothering you," offered Teddie.

"I could challenge him to a duel," I said.

She drew herself up. "Please, Mister St. Xavier," she said coldly, "please keep out of my affairs. Please!"

As we stood watching her go, "Aha," Teddie gloated, "she doesn't want your help, she wants mine."

"She meant both of us," I said. "She just couldn't recall your name."

"Rats. She's in love with me. Saint X, we've got to do something about the Foul-Swine," said Teddie, gnawing his lip.

"Naturally," I said. "Shall I challenge him to that duel anyway? Canes at ten paces, loser to leap into the ocean and swim madly away forever?"

"Don't rot," rebuked Teddie, "and come along."

"I'll tell you what we've got to do," he continued, as we limped along the street together. "We've got to cultivate this Foul-Swine. Play up to him. Find out who and what he is, if any, and how we can go about stepping on him. That girl's in trouble, and by God, we're going to have a stab at getting her out of it."

"Right-ho," I agreed. "We'll play the ruddy C.I.D."

And we did.



WE contrived to meet the hog again within twenty-four hours, in the lobby of one of the big bioscopes, or cinemas, and gave ourselves the high honor and vast pleasure of sitting with him during the show. The very first item was a horse-race, and at once the creature got frightfully keen and loud.

"Ten pounds on Number Nine," he bawled out. "Ten mortal pounds on her nose."

"Taken," said Teddie quietly, and when Number Nine romped in, the winner by a length, he paid up like the gentleman he was. Fall-Swayne chortled with glee as he accepted the notes. "You hadn't a chance," he rumbled, "I saw the bloody film yesterday."

As Teddie and I hobbled homeward, "I detest a man who'll bet on a dead sure thing," I said. "And what do you think of one who'll bet against a dead sure thing?"

"He's an unqualified ass," said I vehemently. "Shake hands with an unqualified ass," said Teddie. "I saw the film last night myself."

I stared at him.

"He'll like me a bit better now that he's taken some of my money. Besides, it gave me a good insight into one aspect of our chum's pleasin' character," he went on. "And that's certainly worth ten pounds."

"I suppose it is," said I.

"And by the way," Teddie said suddenly, "you can just hand over five pounds, and we'll call it even. We're sharing the expense of this investigation."

"Usurer," said I, as I reached for my wallet. "Blighted blood-sucker." And I gave him five pounds.

The weeks went by, and we seemed to get no nearer to a solution of the question that bothered us both so much: what hold had this Foul-Swine animal on our glorious Isa? Our wounds improved and we grew stronger and

more active, but our nerves got jumpy and we were not as cheerful with each other as we had been in the old days.

"Look here, old horse," I said one morning as we were waiting in Markham's for Isa and the Foul-Swine, "It's been five long weeks and we've done nothing at all toward solving our case. All we know is that the Swine's a crooked gambler and—a foul swine. What sort of hold he's got on Isa we haven't an inkling about."

"Shut up, here they come. I've an idea. Just follow my lead," murmured Teddie under his breath as we rose. "Hallo, Isa, hallo, Lucky."

The Foul-Swine chuckled heartily, with a vile belch at the end, like the gross overfed hog that he was. It was absolutely all I could do to keep my hands from his thick red neck.

"Ah, Mac, ah, St. Xavier," he said good-humoredly. He was quite fond of us both, I can tell you, for we'd carefully dropped about a hundred quid apiece to him.

"Saint X and I were just talking about the Flying Dutchman," said Teddie, quite untruthfully.

"Yes," said I, "it's quite an interesting old legend," and received a vicious kick on the ankle from my friend.

"Legend be dashed," said Teddie. "I was saying that I think it's cold sober fact, and I believe Saint X honestly agrees with me, don't you?"

"Yes, certainly, of course I do," I gabbled. "I always did believe that—"

"We were only now remarking," said Teddie remorselessly, "that tomorrow night's the night he's due to come round the Cape again, weren't we?"

"Absolutely," I agreed.

"Or is it the night after?" mused Teddie.

"Yes, I think it is," said I, staring into space.

"Yes, it is."



THE Foul-Swine let out a bellow of merriment. "Ri-ri-ridiculous," he gasped. "Grown men! Ex-soldiers! I always did say India cooks the brains out of you fool youngsters. Flying Dutchman! Flying Fiddlesticks. Damn superstitious nonsense. Y'dn't really believe it? Not even you?"

"Oh, but we do," said Teddie meekly.

"Of course it's a wild and romantic old tale," said Isa Galloway uneasily, "but as for—"

"I believe in it as a sort of fourth-dimensional phenomenon, or what-have-you; I believe there are scientific reasons for the appearances of the Flying Dutchman, just as there is documented evidence proving them, and that they're perfectly understandable if we look on the whole manifestation as evidence of a sort of kink or warp in space and time, as—"

This pompous harangue was interrupted by

a burst of laughter from our cherished Foul-Swine. "Oh, really, this is too much!" croaked the creature. "What d'you say, Isa?"

She smiled oddly. "I believe Teddie's having his little joke with us, isn't he?"

"It's a little joke which'll cost him a couple of hundred quid, if he wants to bet on his bleeding sailor popping round on Thursday night," snorted the swine. "How about it?"

"I'll back my conviction with two thousand pounds sterling," says Teddie very quietly.

I must have turned a few shades lighter, but I strung along nobly. "I'm in for five hundred," I said. And where I was to get it, I didn't know, any more than I knew what Teddie had up his sleeve.

"Taken!" shouted the Foul-Swine. "Isa shall hold stakes. Won't you, my dear?" and he grimaced hideously at her.

She looked from one to the other, bewildered and from her expression perhaps a trifle frightened. "No," said she.

"All right, I forgot your silly prejudice against a little sporting! Rutter. My brother shall hold 'em. O.K.?" he queried.

"All right with us."

"Two thousand five hundred!" the creature exulted. "Enough to get married on."

"Yes," said Teddie, "enough to get married on."

"Yes," I echoed, "quite enough to get married on."

Three minds, occupied with a single glorious thought.

"And now—" said I, when they had left us.

"And now you shall know all, oh my brother," grinned old Teddie. "First, I own a cousin who lives down near Kommetje Beach, and he owns a great wallop old tub of a boat that's been stranded high and dry for Lord knows how long." He paused and winked. "Next, I know where there's half-a-hundred gallons of phosphorescent paint; expensive, but thunder, in a good cause . . ."

"Yes?" said I.

"Now if we took this wallop old tub, and this luminous paint, and some spars and beams and whatnot, and a few old pieces of canvas we might pick up for next to nothing, why—"

"Yes?" said I.

"Two thousand five hundred, as our charming friend the Foul-Swine reminded me, is enough to get married on."

"Yes, but, old horse, what good will it do The Cause to take the man's money? It'll only make him hate us, for he's an awful loser, and bring us no nearer to the answer to—what we want to know."

"Be quiet, boy, and listen."

"With the proceeds of our little swindle, or say rather our business venture, I'll ask Isa to marry me, for frankly I can't afford it unless I get a windfall. If she refuses I shall press

her for the reason—I shall bully her and throw fits until she gives in, and when she tells me what it is that old F.-S. has on her, you and I can deal accordingly with him."

"But there's a flaw. When she tells you that she won't marry you because she's in love with me, what about our Swiney then?"

"If any such fantastic contingency occurs, then you can proceed along the same lines," observed Teddie coldly. "But I admit that such an unlikely event had never even crossed my mind, and now that it has I shall do my best to forget it."



THE theory was that Teddie should help his cousin and me; but the work went so swimmingly that the following afternoon but one he went limping off, after we had slipped a coin and I'd lost, to find Isa Galloway.

You follow the great idea, of course?

We were rigging this old tub of his cousin's (it looked like a cross between a whaler and a Spanish galleon) to imitate the Flying Dutchman; we had put up false masts and flapping imitation sails, with some rope ladders and spars and various nautical-looking impedimenta, and plastered the whole structure with the luminous paint. And that paint was wonderful, too, as it very well should have been for the price we paid. It blazed in the dark like a good deed in a naughty world, as somebody says. Blinking good deed, too, we thought, separating old Swiney from his two thousand five hundred quid. I chortled with merriment as I splashed the phosphorescence over the rails and hull of our gallant Flying Englishman.

We had a date with the Fall-Swaynes, both of them, to climb the cliff road that evening to the old lighthouse, whence we would have a magnificent view of the sea and our pseudo-Dutchman as she came flying round the Cape propelled by what Teddie's cousin assured us were her still perfectly good engines. He had a crew of several genial spirits already champing at their bits to be off and about their nefarious work.

Heigh-ho, to be young again! This was all four years ago.

The climb that evening was pretty average rough on Teddie and me. It was far and away the hardest work we'd done since the scrimmage with Umeer Khan. We decided early in the game not to attempt to reach the lighthouse, but to settle for the lowest promontory which gave a decent view of the ocean. Fortunately I kept watching for the boat, hoping it wouldn't come too soon, then gasping for breath and hoping it would. When we finally reached the top of this particular headland Teddie and I were nearly croaked for good. My leg was giving me hell. But we were nothing compared to old Foul-Swine. Heavens,

how the man puffed and roared! One would have thought we'd all conquered Everest when we sat down on the cliff's edge to wait for sunset.

Teddie dragged me off a little distance and ensconced me against a big boulder. It was the first time we'd been alone since the afternoon. "Listen," he hissed at me tensely, between deep whooping breaths, "I've found out about the Swine and Isa."

"Yes? What?" I asked him.

"Blackmail."

"No!"

"Yes."

"I can't believe it."

"Oh, it was pretty obvious it was that all along, but I had to find out why. It's the oldest bloody story in the world."

"Whatever it is, I can't believe it of Isa," I said stubbornly.

"Of course not, it's her father, you idiot. Don't you ever attend the films? The old old tale. Embezzlement, or bank robbery, or horse thievery, or whatever it always is; but this creature has him in the well-known cleft stick and what more natural than that Isa should marry him?"

"Don't speak blasphemy."

"Well, it's all right now."

"How d'you mean?"

"Naturally, now that we know, we can do something about it."

"What?"

"I'm not sure yet. Take what opportunities the gods award us and keep our blinking heads shut meantime."

"It's still pretty hard to take in," I murmured. "It's such a devilish old plot."

"Isn't it, though? Your daughter's hand or off you go to prison! I'm thinking of the devilish old solution, too. There's no documentary evidence, I gathered. Just this fat grunting porpoise himself, and what's locked in his thick head. He brags about his nerve to Isa and taunts her to kill him. He is a nasty piece of work, but he must have a certain brute courage."

"Why did Isa tell you?" I asked Teddie.

"She's in love with me."

"Oh, come, laddie, she can't be in love with both of us."

"That's right."

"So obviously—"

"She broke down and cried," he said, the bantering tone gone from his voice. "She cried like—a poor pitiful little fountain."

"I say," I growled uncomfortably, "we shall have to put it to this animal rather strongly. Pull out his beastly tongue by its beastly roots, and cut off his hairy hands—then let him tell anyone about her father."

"I'll think of something," said Teddie. "Hush, here they are."



THE Foul-Swine and his spindly, weasel-like brother came up.

"Well," he jeered, "here we are. And it's four hours till midnight, and, then, ha ha!"

"Ha ha, indeed, Lucky," agreed Teddie MacLagan, and his voice was suddenly most amiable. "Sure you don't want to call it off? Save your wad?"

"Me? Ho, I've bet on plenty of sure things in my time but this beats 'em all. Ghosts!" he spat coarsely. "Goblins!"

"No, scientific phenomena and fourth-dimensional astral forms," said Teddie.

"Rot," said Foul-Swine, or a word to that effect. "I don't know what the blazes you're talking about, and neither do you, I believe."

"What would you say to proof royal?" Teddie asked him. "Ever hear that King George V saw the Dutchman with his own eyes?"

"No," the animal grunted. I looked past him, for I wasn't sure how long I could stare at him without being ill, and saw the sun sinking beyond the sea and turning it all a soft lovely orange color, something like my idea of the pavements of heaven; you've all seen the Cape at sunset, haven't you? Pure wondrous sorcery of nature.

"Perfectly true," Teddie was continuing. "About 1881, I believe it happened, when the King was a little midshipman on the *Bacchante* or the *Tourmaline*, I forget which. There were three of Her Majesty's cruisers together and they all saw the Flying Dutchman pass near them, burning with an eerie luster and with all sails set."

The Foul-Swine made a noise of unbelief. "And the lookout man who first sighted her fell from the foretopmost cross-trees the next morning and was killed instantly."

"What? Why?"

"The legend says that doom and disaster will follow all those who sight the Hollander," said Teddie, in deliberately sepulchral tones. Even I shuddered a little, and the Foul-Swine pawed uneasily at his fat hanging jowls.

"Himph," he said.

Well, darkness fell, or came up out of the sea, rather, and the little filmy clouds blew about us, and the sky got blacker and blacker, and the stars came out, and the moon, and we sat on the edge of the cliff and strained our eyes. Occasionally Teddie or I would steal a glance at our watches, and shift fretfully, because his cousin was overdue. And the two checks, reposing in the lesser Swine's pocket, were about as valuable as if we'd written them in vanishing ink on vanilla junket. I distinctly felt "the shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the idiot child," or however Wordsworth has it.

Eleven came, and eleven-thirty, and soon it was five minutes to midnight.

"Led's go," said Foul-Swine irritably. "I've caught a cold id by head up here od this ghastly boundain."

"Oh, give us five minutes, Lucky, before you take our money," said Teddie. "We've got till twelve."

"All ride, all ride."

We were all standing on the very edge, first the minor Fall-Swayne, then myself, then Teddie and on the end our own dear Swiney himself. It was darker than it usually is when there's a moon, but we could see the lights of Cape Town and the reflected glow of other lights on the clouds above us, and far out beyond the beach the tiny, tiny lights of whatever it is that traffics on and in the sea at night.

And all at once, around a spit of land, as casual and unperturbed as dammit, came our jolly old phosphorescent Flying Englishman! I was never more glad to see anything than I was to see that wallowing butter-tub of a sea-going wreck as she nosed around and came sailing majestically down past the cliffs, a bone in her teeth and going like sixty.

What a sight the old girl made! We had splashed the paint on her spars and rigging and sails and along her rail, but it seemed to have seeped all over her and she glowed like the phantom ship she was got up to represent; she looked like a real old Dutch brigantine. As she slid past below us, sails belying and the spray flying from her prow, I flung myself on my stomach and stared after her. She was a masterpiece, a splendid sight in more ways than one, to me and to Teddie.

His cousin had been working on her even after I left him, for there were touches we hadn't thought of: a red lantern on her poop-deck and one in her rigging, a big glowing wheel with a shining man standing to it (he must have put paint on his clothing), and her name in tall letters of cold evil fire across her stern: *Spyuten Duyvil*, I could read it from the cliff-top.

As she passed beneath us I let out a long sigh, of content and wonder, and I heard the Foul-Swine's brother begin to pray in a squeaking whisper. Then old Swiney drew in a shuddering breath, opened his lips and there was the ungodliest shriek I ever heard and he gave a leap straight out from the cliff and soared down like a great plump bird, while we who were left shouted and stretched out futile arms toward the plummeting body. It seemed to take him an age to fall all the way.

"By God," breathed Teddie, "the Flying Englishman."

As we turned a short time later to go down the trail, "What a terrible tragedy," said Teddie. "He saw the Dutchman and the curse of doom held good, and he died."

"We'll die, we'll all die," raved the dead man's brother. "We're doomed men."

"In the meantime," went on Teddie reverently, "we know he saw the brig and I think he'd want me to have the wager. He was always a good, fair, honest chap."

"Yes," said the brother, digging into his pocket. "I've got the checks right here and they're certainly yours."

A little farther down I contrived to get just behind Teddie.

"Did you push the Swine off?" I whispered in his ear.

He turned a face to me that was all injured innocence in the moonlight. "Why, Saint X," he said sweetly, "how could you think such a horrid thing?"



THE curse of the Dutchman came true in all our cases, even if she was only a fake, for Fall-Swayne's brother, who had been going about in a horrified daze, was killed in a motor accident a month afterwards, and I was sent up here instead of back to the Frontier. And Teddie, dear old Teddie, got married to Isa Galloway with his share of the two-and-a-half thou, and has three children already, so the curse would seem to be working there too.

"That was a neatly-worked sell," said Griff Falconer, "and I think it was quite right of you to take the creature's money, since he was an admittedly dishonest gambler and a black-mailer, which is the dirtiest thing in the world."

"Except a Bengali babu," murmured Jack Martyn. "Did he really push the old slob off the mountain?"

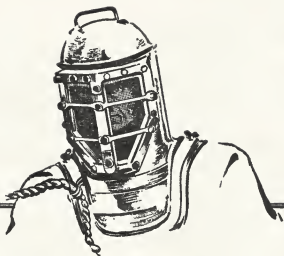
"Who knows? He'd never admit it to me. And the Foul-Swine might easily have been struck mad with fear and shock. As Teddie said, 'He was Swine by name and swine by nature. He had a devil in him, like the Gadarene swine. He went mad, and in his madness he plunged off a cliff, once more like the Gadarene swine.'

"And that may be the true explanation. It was a beautifully-got-up ship, and it scared even me, who knew it was faked, when I saw it come sliding down under the cliffs. But it scared me even worse the next day, when Teddie's cousin told me something; that is, it did until I remembered that the MacLagan clan are wonderful liars and confirmed practical jokers."

"What did he tell you?"

St. Xavier took a long slow thoughtful drink of brandy and soda.

"He swore that when he and his boys launched the old tub that evening at eight o'clock she floated out fifty yards and sank like a rock, so that they all had to swim for it, and they never came near the cliffs that night or any other."



ONE-IN-A-MILLION

A FACT STORY

By K. M. WALKER

as told to

John Scott Douglas

WE MARINE surveyors call ourselves the "One-in-a-Million Club"—there's but one of us to each million in the population. To define our work as inspectors or investigators of marine damage claims sounds milder than the facts warrant. Investigating damaged, wrecked or sunken ships and writing reports for the guidance of marine adjusters is routine procedure, but when salvage is necessary our work becomes intensely dramatic. Then, acting as wreck masters, we become salvage men, attempting to recover both ship and cargo. Dangerous work is this; and a constant challenge to human ingenuity, for each wrecked or sunken ship poses different problems. But it's salvage operations that give our job its zest.

Now my father was a marine surveyor, with headquarters in Seattle, and I fell naturally

into the same niche. My training for the work started when I ran away to sea at twelve on a windjammer bound for East Africa. From then on I spent more time on ships than in school, until my despairing father had me apprenticed to a shipyard. When I had stayed my full four years, plus another three as a ship designer, he was convinced I had settled down and took me into partnership. I worked with my father on a number of salvage operations before he placed me in charge of salvaging the 8,000-ton passenger ship *Royal George*, which struck a pinnacle rock in a thick fog when approaching the northern end of Vancouver Island in Queen Charlotte Straits.

Our wrecking tug and several work barges reached the *Royal George*, to find her bow hung on the rock she'd struck and her stern in a hundred feet of water. We had two good divers

aboard, but as I'd been practicing shallow diving, I decided to make my first working descent to see how the ship lay. A survey of the smoking room on the after boat deck might give an idea of the ship's buoyancy possibilities. I was helped into diving dress, hoisted over the rail, and lowered to the *Royal George's* boat deck.

After making sure that my life line and air hose were not fouled, I worked down the sloping deck to the smoking-room door. While groping along in that room, something touched my shoulder and I turned my submarine lamp to see what it was. My scalp tightened at seeing a man with disheveled black hair, a dark suit and a shirt of grayish-appearing wool. His staring eyes and gaping mouth made my heart hammer in sudden panic. Obviously the steamship-company report that all passengers and crew had been saved was wrong.

I pushed the dead man away, and continued with my examination, only to feel something jar my back. My lamp showed that it was the corpse. Though I shoved it away once more, it continued "following" me because of currents eddying gently through the smoking room. This gave me such a gruesome sensation that I hauled my persistent friend outside and stuffed him stern first into a ventilator. Later I intended to haul down fifty feet of life line, take a hitch around the body, and send it up as a pleasant surprise to those on deck. But after my investigation was completed, the corpse had drifted away into the murk. My story of the dead man was ascribed to imagination, and when the regular divers failed to find a body, there was considerable rough humor about "Walker's corpse" during the remainder of our operations.

Salvaging the *Royal George* was a tough operation fraught with difficulties, but space here permits only a brief glimpse of our working methods. A cofferdam of three-by-twelve-inch pine timbers was designed and assembled on the barges, and then knocked down. Sunk with anchors, it was reassembled in the murky water by divers working entirely by feel. This cofferdam was bolted to the sides of the ship; and it was additionally braced inside by another complicated system of timber supports. Then the outside of the cofferdam was wrapped with canvas to seal off the water after pumping began.

Last of all, we pumped water from the wreck. When the stern rose enough so that ten feet of the cofferdam were above water, it was sawed off to prevent the then top-heavy structure from collapsing. Pumping was stopped each time another ten feet of the cofferdam was exposed, so that another section could be cut away.

I set up headquarters in the ship's pilot-house, a youthfully foolhardy stunt that an-

gered my father when later he heard of it. But at the time it speeded up the work, and the *Royal George* was soon afloat. Her own buoyancy kept her that way when we towed her stern first to a Vancouver drydock. A few days afterward a body washed ashore near our scene of operations, dressed precisely like the corpse I have described. Whether the man had been a stowaway or an unlisted passenger remains one of those unsolved mysteries of the sea.



NOT long afterward, the freighter *Miltiades* was south bound from Juneau with a full cargo of Alaskan canned salmon when her mate, Mr. McKay, got an echo from his whistle and knew he was off his course in the cottony fog then prevailing. He reached for the engine-room telegraph to stop the ship, but before he could push the lever, she struck a knife-edged reef. Mr. McKay was hurled through the open window and, after somersaulting and landing on his feet on the deck below, he was giving orders to the nearest seamen as if such gymnastics were everyday occurrences.

The *Miltiades* had run into the reef at Hidden Inlet, on the ocean side of Klawock Island, not far from Ketchikan, and by the time I reached her in a wrecking tug, storm warnings reported a full gale approaching within a few hours. The ship had struck the sharp reef squarely and the rocks had pierced the Number 1 hold. She would be pounded to pieces in a gale, so I quickly decided to try to salvage part of her rather than return empty-handed.

Recovering the cases of salmon in the Number 1 hold by cargo boom and winches would be too slow. But the Indians on shore, hopefully regarding the *Miltiades*, gave me an idea. I had my men cut six-foot-square holes in either side of the hull with acetylene torches, and while this was being done, oil drums were being lashed together and a temporary walk over them was constructed, reaching to the shore. The Indians were hired to pass cases of salmon from one another like a bucket brigade, and they earned plenty of wampum for their swift unloading job.

Then, with time running short, the nose of the *Miltiades* was sliced off with acetylene torches down to the waterline. The last cutting was done while the tide was still high, and as it ebbed, the bottom plates creaked and buckled and at length parted. Hawseers were already fast, so the wrecking tug began towing the wreck stern-first. This relieved any strain on the bulkhead between Number 1 and 2 holds, and also made her easier to handle. The *Miltiades* was very much down in the head, but we got her behind the shelter of the nearest island before the storm was upon us,

and eventually towed her safely to a Vancouver yard.

Here a new bow was built and on the next northbound voyage, the *Miltiades'* master saluted the original bow with three blasts of the whistle as he passed Hidden Inlet. The blasts were mournfully echoed by the pine-timbered hills behind the rusting bow.

After these two operations, my father called me into his office one day, and with a gleam in his eye, told me that he was entrusting me with the salvage of the *Sioux*. In a near-hurricane gale, this 200-ton passenger ship was driven ashore on the northern side of Angeles Spit, near Port Angeles in Puget Sound. Finding the wreck high and dry, close inshore, with a raging surf clawing up the steep beach, I suspected that my father had given me the job to teach me humility.

Our wrecking tug couldn't put a line on her—a line wouldn't have helped while she lay in the throat of the damaging seas. Dredging a channel for such a small boat was too expensive to consider. I spent hours studying the problem and discarding various unworkable schemes. I hated to admit failure. Yet I dared not risk hauling such a lightly built steel shell into the seaward side of the point. The impossibility of salvaging the boat by customary methods led me to consider a new approach.

I discovered deep water on the opposite side of Angeles Spit, which at first seemed of little help because the spit was a half-mile across. Still, it appeared to offer the only hope.

Filled with misgivings, I had greased skids laid down to the bow of the boat and then a crew excavated around the keel. Several hundred house-movers' jacks were rented and the boat was lifted so that skids could be placed under a cradle built to support her. Then I rented four sturdy horses, and with these animals straining on two house-movers' windlasses, the *Sioux* began her overland passage.

Day after day the horses heaved away and daily the crews tore up the first skids laid down and moved them ahead of the boat. It was two weeks before the *Sioux* completed her crossing of the spit. Then she was launched, bow first, into deep water. After being towed to drydock, she required only minor repairs to make her once more shiplike.

From a salvage man's standpoint, one of my most interesting operations while working with father was raising the *Klickitat*, a wooden passenger boat which sank in 200 feet of water in Elliott Bay, close to the Seattle docks.

Huge cylindrical pontoons are usually employed to raise a ship from deep water. After being flooded and sunk near enough to a wreck to be made fast by divers, the water is pumped from the pontoons and their buoyancy raises the ship. Pontoons are tricky and dan-

gerous, however, and the chance of their breaking loose when rising is enough to make a salvage man hesitate. At the depth at which the *Klickitat* sank, such artificial means was not feasible financially, and I wondered whether the wreck might not be raised by natural forces.

The experiment seemed worth trying. Divers went below and made lines fast to the sunken boat. These lines were secured to windlasses rigged on timbers placed across two wooden scows which lay 25 feet apart. They were hauled tightly to prevent them from separating. As the tide rose, the vessel lifted off the bottom and the scows were towed shoreward, until the boat suspended beneath them once more grounded. At slack water the lines were again tightened, and at the next high tide the wreck was moved further inshore.

This procedure was repeated until the boat lay in comparatively shallow water, with her deck house exposed. Then the hole in her hull was patched, water was pumped out of her, and she was towed to the shipyard.

Partnership with my lusty, good-natured father had always been so pleasant that his death came as a heavy blow. Since our partnership was automatically dissolved, I chose that time to change my scene of operations to the Great Lakes.



NOT long after moving to Chicago, a new salvage job came my way. The mate of a ship loaded with pig iron mistook the light on Colchester Reef in Lake Erie for a vessel in tow, and ran hard on the rocky reef near the mouth of the Detroit River. Floating her would have been easy had it not been for her heavy cargo and the ugly weather at the time.

It was Pacific Coast practice to cut losses by salvaging all possible cargo, and since the ship was loaded with pig iron of high value, I followed this practice. For weeks while Lake Erie was swept with bitterly cold winds and heavy seas, I kept our ship's derrick busy unloading the various types of pig iron from the wreck into piles on the lake bottom. It was taken first from one side of the damaged vessel, then the other, to avoid unbalancing her.

Patching and pulling the ship into deep water after lightening her was routine procedure, but selling the pig iron was not. Buyers knew that the four grades of pig iron aboard were quite valueless if mixed. By use of magnets I proved that each type had been carefully separated during the salvage operation, and was thereby able to sell it at a good price.

On the Great Lakes came my first experience as a "marine detective." Our most irksome problem is investigating the loss of a ship that has disappeared. Like *corpus delicti* in crimi-

nal cases, a "body" must be found to "prove the crime." Now finding a sunken ship isn't always possible, but satisfactory evidence of loss must be established.

In one case I had to prove that the *Cameroon* sank the night she vanished in a heavy snow storm on Lake Superior. My first step as a marine detective was tracking down and interviewing every captain whose ship might have passed the vessel that night. After following many blind leads, I discovered a master who had sighted the *Cameroon* near Port Arthur on the Canadian side of the lake on the afternoon she disappeared. She was then dead astern, this captain said, and only momentarily visible when the flying snow cleared.

Then I hired a fisherman familiar with those waters to sail among the small islands off the north shore. After days of searching, we were unable to find an oar, lifejacket, or any other evidence.

When about to give up, my guide noticed a small break in the snow-covered bushes on one island. He remembered no trail there, but when we went ashore, we found one leading up the bank through the trees and disappearing over a small hill. Snow had drifted over icy tracks. These we followed until, at the crest, we found a small, crudely built hut of twigs and branches half buried in snow. Inside were five frozen corpses, all men and all without coats. Broken matches told of vain attempts at fire-building. Another snowy mound suggested the presence of other bodies, and after digging there, we found two dead women clothed, chivalrously, in the five men's coats.

The seven were identified as crew members of the missing ship (Great Lakes ships often carry women cooks and stewardesses), and that was sufficient evidence for payment of the claim. It was the only evidence ever found of the lost ship.



ANOTHER claim requiring detective work had a curious ending.

Twenty years before the beginning of the century, sister ships were launched at a small shipyard on the west side of Lake Huron. Twin launchings are unusual enough in peacetime to draw large crowds, but in this instance the beautiful twin sisters sponsoring the ship were added inducement.

The lovely sisters broke bottles of champagne on the bows, and the *Lady Alice* and the *Lady Grace* slid down the ways. Within a year the *Lady Alice* burned and sank in Lake Huron, and the *Lady Grace* had such a troublesome record that her owners renamed her the *Langell Boys* to "change her luck." She sailed the lakes for forty years thereafter before she, in turn, caught fire and sank in Lake Huron.

Though the approximate position where she burned was known, I checked the wind and current for that day at the Detroit Weather Bureau and decided she must have found her grave somewhere off the Black River. Proceeding there, I found a fisherman who said a wreck had drifted in one night and he pointed out a spar impaling the water far off shore.

The fisherman took me to it, and I made out the name *Langell Boys* through perhaps a fathom of clear water. It was enough evidence for payment of a claim—the vessel's age and ruined hull would make salvage unprofitable. As we started to leave, I detected another hulk below, so bearded with grasses and coated with slime as to be almost indistinguishable. A diver could have stepped from the *Langell Boys* deck to that of the derelict lying alongside.

"There's a second ship down there!" I cried. "I know," the old fisherman agreed. "She's the *Lady Alice*."

After forty years of separation, the *Lady Grace* and the *Lady Alice* were together again!

Marine insurance isn't limited to lake and ocean shipping. Often a client insuring a boat will take out marine insurance on other property. This accounted for some peculiar experiences along the Mississippi and Ohio and their tributaries.

One company I represented had for many years insured both the boat and the house of an Ohio policy-holder. But one year he allowed insurance to lapse on his house, and that year the Ohio overflowed its banks. When I went to survey the damage, the house was demolished and in the river, where the boat was usually moored. The boat had been deposited by receding floodwaters, quite undamaged, on the house foundations. It was a simple matter to build a small ways to launch the boat. I was glad that the problem of what to do about the house was not mine.

During one of the big Mississippi floods, I had many wrecks and salvage cases along the Big Muddy and its tributaries. One of my companies carried insurance on the store and stock of goods of a storekeeper on an Arkansas creek and I was sent to check the damage on the goods covered by a marine policy. I hired a boatman to take me up the creek in his powered flat boat.

We couldn't always follow the course of the swollen creek even by means of trees bordering its banks, but eventually we reached a store building flooded almost to the second story. I climbed through an upstairs window. High water was so common in that region that the storekeeper and his wife had, from long habit, moved all their goods to the second floor when the creek began rising. So nothing was damaged.

But since it was still raining, I decided to

spend the night there rather than return by dark. The storekeeper gave me a bed by the window. In spite of logs and flotsam occasionally jarring the building, I slept reasonably well until awakened by someone stepping on my stomach.

"Sorry, brother," a man whispered. "I'm flooded out."

I went back to sleep, but was soon awakened by a couple clambering through the window and over me. The sixth time this happened, I protested to the storekeeper. He seemed astonished at my annoyance. Holding a lantern outside, he showed me a row of mooring rings level with the window. Eight bobbing boats were secured to the rings.

"Folks always tie up their boats here during floods," he explained.

In a tree near the corner I caught the whitish gleam of two eyes, and asked the storekeeper to raise his lantern. Perched in the topmost branches was a terrified Negro mammy, and below her, coiled around a branch, was a water moccasin. . . We rescued her.

I was thankful to depart in the morning.



AFTER seventeen years as a mid-western marine surveyor, I had an opportunity to establish San Diego headquarters. And it was while on the Pacific coast that I became engaged in my most memorable salvage operation, one which had comic opera aspects and nearly resulted in an international incident.

During a hurricane, the 8,000-ton German cargo ship *Astris* was driven ashore close to a small native village south of San José, Guatemala. Under the lash of the wind, the seas were unusually high, and the ship fetched up far beyond tidewater and lay abandoned for years. Then came the war and ship values skyrocketed, making costly salvage worthwhile.

A German firm engaged to salvage her attempted to dredge a basin in order to float her back to the ocean. Sand filled the basin at each high tide, causing the German salvage outfit to abandon their effort.

Soon after the United States entered the war, I was asked to recover the *Astris*. Knowing that it would test both ingenuity and equipment, the big wrecking tug *Salvor*, once a Pacific Coast lumber schooner, was engaged for the job. But before she could reach Guatemala, an American Negro, Homer Jackman, did some salvage work on his own account.

A big, self-possessed man he was. Upon our arrival, he told us he'd skipped ship in San José and was living in the Guatemalan village. During shipboard years, he'd picked up considerable electrical knowledge. As soon as the German salvagers left, he searched the wreck and found sufficient wire, light sockets, globes and everything else needed to wire the

streets of the village with electric lights. Power was supplied by stoking the ship's donkey boiler with wood and the ship's coal until enough steam was raised to run the ship's generator. The Negro was regarded by the villagers as an electrical wizard, and as a result of lighting their streets, enjoyed great prestige.

Homer protested upon learning our intention of salvaging the ship, for he'd then be unable to provide lights. He contended that since the wreck was on Guatemalan soil and not in the sea, we would infringe on her territory if we removed the *Astris*. Not taking him seriously, we continued planning our work. The Negro complained to the local comandante, and that gentleman wired Guatemala City. Guatemala backed up Homer's contention by lodging a protest with our State Department. Before we knew anything of this, a radiogram arrived demanding an explanation of our actions.

A ticklish position it was, for if matters took their usual course, our government would order us to leave. Yet it seemed absurd to lose a good ship simply to maintain Homer's prestige.

Clearly this was the basis of his stubborn attitude. To placate him, I promised to build a concrete foundation for the ship's generator and donkey boiler—the only parts in which he was interested. He was delighted and withdrew his protest; and Guatemala did likewise.

There remained the problem of salvaging a large ship from dry land. The Germans' method was faulty because they tried to build a basin merely of sand. We did not excavate the soft, shifting sand but built a channel on top of it, of sheet steel piling. Then pure cement was dumped into the channel, raked into the sand and wet down. The result was a channel with a cement bottom. On the seaward side we erected a timber-and-earth dam.

After completing the basin, it was filled by large centrifugal pumps. The ship floated and was pulled down near the seaward end. At high tide the dam was dynamited out and the rush of water from the half-mile long channel swept the *Astris* out to sea. Most of the sheet steel piling was salvaged and loaded aboard.

It was dusk when we prepared to leave, and the village was brilliantly lighted. We had done better than keep our promise to Homer. In addition to installing the generator and the donkey boiler on a concrete platform and leaving him sufficient oil and tools to run them for several years, we installed the *Astris'* whistle and whistle cord.

As we started northward with the cargo ship in tow, Homer sounded three long, shrill farewell blasts with this whistle to show that he harbored no ill will. We answered the only American in that Guatemalan village with three blasts from our own horn. Homer had the improvising instinct of a true salvage man, and that was something we respected.

ILLUSTRATED BY PETE KUHLOFF



At the end of an hour, it was Charley's turn. "Go ahead," says Horse . . . "I'm tired," says Charley. "You go ahead."

By

JIM

KJELGAARD

CHARLEY HOE HANDLE AND THE GREAT BIG BASS



NOW YOU can look at a bass, and quite often up here in Stick County we get the chance to do just that. But we never looked at any bass oftener than we did at them in Markney's Quarry Hole.

It wasn't a real honest-to-john quarry hole. Old Markney had just took and blasted a lot of rock out from besides Crease Crick so's he'd have some place to get rock to use on the road.

But the place had took and filled plump up with water what came from a moderate-cold spring—the year 'round it held at about sixty-four degrees. There had been a lot of minnies and such stuff in it. But now there wasn't much except these six bass.

Nobody knowed where they had come from and nobody give much of a dang about five of 'em—they wasn't more'n just average. But the

sixth one! I've saw a lot of bass, and I know there ain't one fisherman in a hundred as don't like to add a couple inches to every fish he ketches. But I try not to do that, and in my sober judgment that old-timer in Markney's Quarry Hole would of went two foot from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail. As for what he'd weigh—six and a half pounds wouldn't be overly guessin'.

And probly there wasn't a famouser fish in Stick County. Since he'd first been saw, three years ago, most ever'body up here has had at least one whack at him. Every pilgrim what comes through has their tries too. But, though that old bronzeback did bust a little tackle, he was too smart to get caught.

Then Charley Hoe Handle and Horse Jenkins really took after him.



NOW THIS Charley Hoe Handle, he's been runnin' wild up here in the woods of Stick County since anybody at all can remember.

Never could he get the idea that he, like ever'body else, is supposed to mind fish and game laws. Every warden in here has tried to clap the old swamp cat behind bars. But, if in all Stick County they's a slicker trapped-pinchd coyote, somebody has yet to see it. Charley Hoe Handle knows every trick in the bag, and he makes up new ones at the right times.

Of all the wardens what's ever been on his track, probly none has stuck tighter or give up any harder than Horse Jenkins. Time after time he'd tried to clap the old ridge-runner behind bars, and lots of time he's come close. But he's never quite done it. Charley Hoe Handle and Horse don't exactly hate each other. But I guess there ain't two men in Stick County with more respect for one another. An', as far as they can see, everything what goes on between them is fair.

Charley was leanin' against Sullivan's store, with his old black hat pulled over his eyes, sort of dozin' in the late summer sun, when Horse Jenkins come down the street with a big seine draped over his arm. He was almost abreast the store when Sullivan come out.

"Well, well, Horse," says Sullivan. "Don't tell me you're aimin' to turn vi'lator?"

"Nope," says Horse. "Not quite. I'm just goin' down and seine them bass out of Markney's Quarry Hole. I got an idea I can use that place for a trout-rearin' pond, an' I won't keep a small trout there without them bass are out."

Charley Hoe Handle come awake, pushed his hat back, and looked sleepy-like at Horse. But Horse talked first.

"Hi, Charley," says he. "How come you ain't out gettin' yourself a mess of trout? Don't you know the season's closed?"

Charley Hoe Handle didn't ruffle a feather.

"Hi, Horse," he says. "If I was goin' to get myself a mess of fish I'd get 'em on a rod. I wouldn't have to use a seine—like some game wardens I can mention."

"Why, you—" says Horse.

His face got red, and he looked like he was goin' to holler. Then he thought better of it and just smirked a little; Sullivan thought he looked like a cat which has just ate a whole pitcher of cream without leavin' any evidence.

"Mebbe-so," he says, "you could take that old bronzeback in the quarry hole on a rod?"

"Mebbe-so I could," says Charley Hoe Handle.

"Did you ever try?"

"Nope."

That was true. Charley Hoe Handle was probly the one man in Stick County what hadn't had a whack at that bass. Horse smirked a little wider.

"I think," says he, "that you're four-flush-in'."

"So," says Charley, "that's what you think."

"Charley," says Horse, "I've got a bet to make with you."

"So?" says Charley.

"You and me will fish for that big bass together! The one what ketches him can tell the other what to do for the next two months. If I ketch him, I can keep you out of your woods for the next two months. If you ketch him, you can keep me off, and I'll keep my deppities off your trail for the same time."

"And if neither ketches him?"

"No bet."

"I'll take you up on that," says Charley Hoe Handle.



AS YOU might suspicion, Sullivan didn't lose no time in gettin' that news spread around. The next mornin' practically ever'body in Stick County, eighty-two of the ninety people what live here, was settin' in the bushes around Markney's Quarry Hole watchin' Horse Jenkins froth at the mouth on account Charley Hoe Handle wasn't there. It must of been about nine o'clock when Charley ambled along with his old castin' rod in his hand and a plug danglein' from it. He was grinnin'.

"Hi, Horse," says he.

"So you finally got here!" says Horse. "Do you want to have any extra rules made?"

"Oh, I don't much give a hoot," says Charley. "I do think we should ought to take turns fish-in'. Go ahead."

Horse steps up with his castin' rod, unlimbers her, and sends his plug sailin' across that quarry hole. And, right then and there, ever'body watchin' could see that here was a castin' rod in the hands of a man what knew how to use it. Horse retrieved just right, and the crowd could see them six bass layin' down there in

that clear water. One of 'em turned, smacked Horse's plug, and he played it in to shore. Horse dropped it into a can of water, so's he could take and release it in a good bass crick, and stepped back so's Charley could cast.

Charley done all right. But he wasn't as good with a rod as Horse was, nor was he quick on the strike. A small bass smacked his plug and he didn't hook it. They went on like that for maybe an hour, and mebbe-so Horse caught one of them small bass with every third cast. Charley had some strikes, but he didn't hook nothin' and by that time the crowd was hootin' at Charley and cheerin' for Horse. At the end of an hour the small bass was all caught and it was Charley's turn.

"Go ahead," says Horse.

"I'm tired," says Charley. "You go ahead."

Horse stood on the edge of that quarry hole and cast, and it was still easy to see that his rod was in the hands of a man able to make it lay down and say uncle. He tried every trick he knowed. He cast her far and he cast her short. He retrieved her fast and he hauled her in slow. He made her dive and he kept her on top. Once, just once, that big bass riz up a little to sniff at the plug. But he went right back down. Finally, at the end of another hour, Horse woke up Charley Hoe Handle, who was sleepin' in the grass.

"Get up and fish," says he.

"Oh yes," says Charley Hoe Handle.

He sat up, tamped his old black pipe full of tobacco, and smoked her out. Then he ambled down to the quarry hole and cast. But somethin' had happened. Charley wasn't makin' fuml'n' casts no longer. His plug sailed out twenty feet beyond where that bass was layin'

and Charley started to retrieve her. He'd jerk, and let her rest, then jerk and let her rest again. The plug was ten feet this side of the big bass when he turned around and hit her like a herd of stampedin' cattle. Charley was a full four minutes playin' him in to the bank.

He held him up by the gills, that big bass of Markney's Quarry Hole, and ever'body around come down to have a look at and heft him. And one thing you got to say for Horse Jenkins, he was game.

"Well," says he, "it's for you to say."

"I want you to spend your spare time in the next two months mountin' this big bass," says Charley Hoe Handle. "Then you can show the sports who come here what kind of fish they might ketch in Stick County."

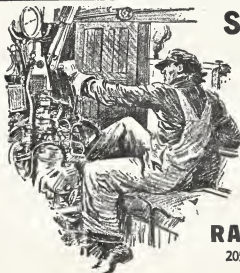
"But-- How about the free hand you could have?"

"Do you think I wanna miss all the fun?" says Charley Hoe Handle. "I'd skassly know what to do if you or one of your deppitties wasn't chasin' me. Of course, it ain't that I ever do anything illegal."

For a couple of minutes they stood lookin' at each other, and there wasn't no friendliness in their looks. But you could still tell that these two prob'ly respected each other as much as any two men in Stick County. Finally, "How'd you do it?" says Horse.

"You should ought to know your fish," says Charley Hoe Handle. "This'n was just as anxious to hit a plug as any of the little ones was. But a bass this big got that way on account he's smart. He saw your plug, and what happened to them little bass what hit it."

"But, until you caught all them little ones out, I wasn't usin' no hooks."



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THE freighter *False Bay*, Liverpool to New York, churned along at a safe speed southeast of Cape Race. At regular intervals, her steam-whistle emitted a mournful blast although there was no fog. There was a biting chill on the North Atlantic and Mr. Fanshaw, in great-coat and muffler, paced the narrow bridge restively. Despite the cold, he was boiling inside.

It wasn't the skipper's orders so much as the calm, methodical assurance with which they

were given that irritated the mate. "Keep a sharp lookout for ice blink and calf ice, Mr. Fanshaw. Blow the whistle every five minutes and listen for possible echoes. Bend an ear for crackling, watch for seals—" And so, on and on, a meticulous reiteration of what the captain had already written in the night order book.

Often, Mr. Fanshaw was sorely tempted to tell Captain Colby to go below and try knitting; but you don't talk that way to a master. Not at sea, you don't. The mate was biding his time

ILLUSTRATED BY
WILLIAM F. TIMMINS

NORTH OF FORTY

•
By
FRED LANE
•

*"But, Captain," pleaded
Mr. Fanshaw, "it's just
another nor'wester."*

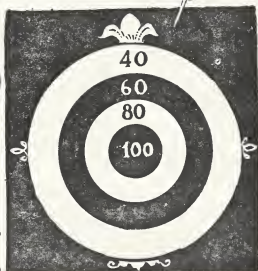


until the *False Bay* docked in the East River. Meantime, he scowled out at a sea that was still sullen and restless after a nasty northwester. It was a sea that matched his mood.

"Nearly a day late already," he growled to Mr. Jackson, when the third mate relieved him for dinner at four bells, "an' here we are creep-in' along like a sick jelly-fish. An' me due to marry Rosie next Thursday."

"Rosie'll probably keep," said Mr. Jackson.

"Sure, I ain't worried about that. But a man



only gets married once in a lifetime—that is to a girl like Rosie," he added hastily. "An' besides, there's no excuse for all these delays. You'd think that little walkin' rule-book was skipper of a Cunarder with a full passenger list and a hold full of specie instead of an old tub what couldn't hit an iceberg if she tried."

The third mate shrugged. He had no Rosie waiting for him. He'd been married three times and was in no particular hurry for any further matrimonial voyages.

"Rules!" Mr. Fanshaw went on belligerently. "That's all he thinks about. Why, to him a stick of driftwood is an obstruction to navigation; a Beaufort 2 breeze is a hurricane. You'd think we were a bunch of cadets on a blasted school-ship. I'm telling you, Mr. Jackson, this is my first and last trip aboard this packet."



BACK on the bridge after a repast of the ubiquitous roast beef, the mate resumed his pacing. He mellowed somewhat when his thoughts turned to Rosie and, in his mind, he read and reread the letter he had received from her in Liverpool. "My darling great big sailor-mans," she had begun, and ended with "Oceans of love and a kiss on every wave." It was love, all right. Mr. Fanshaw was sure of that. One of those things that happen just once in a man's lifetime—if he's lucky.

Mr. Fanshaw had come up fast. Ambitious and impatient, he had acquired his master's papers at an age when most men would have been content with a second or third mate's ticket. Now, it was but a matter of time before he'd get a ship of his own. There hadn't been much time for girls. Mr. Fanshaw had been too busy studying. There had been a few, of course; acquaintances in Frisco, Sydney, or Shanghai. Ships that pass in the night sort of thing. But nothing like Rosie, who ran a dart game in Coney Island. "I wouldn't do this kind of work," Rosie told him, "if I didn't have my little brother to send through school. We're all alone in the world." And she had sighed pathetically. Poor little Rosie.

The mate allowed himself a reminiscent smile as he recalled their first meeting. She had singled him out of all that crowd: "C'mon, han'-some. Hit the bull's-eye and win a baby-doll." Well, he hadn't won a baby-doll, but he had won Rosie. Beautiful Rosie with her corn-yellow hair and violet eyes. Love at first sight!

"Mister Fanshaw!" Captain Colby's mild voice broke into the mate's blissful reverie. "Observe any ice sign?"

"If I had, I'd have reported it—sir," the mate snapped. "Fact is, Cap'n Colby," he added, "the radio reports don't show any bergs near our position. Seems to me, we could proceed at full speed without any danger."

Captain Colby didn't answer for a moment.

First he fanned the horizon with a long, searching gaze. He waited for the next blast of the whistle and listened intently for an echo. Then he turned and began stroking his gray beard. The mate choked back a curse. He knew what was coming. Captain Colby always stroked his beard just before going into one of his windy hornpipes about rules, regulations, and general seamanship.

"Mr. Fanshaw," the captain began slowly, "impatience is, perhaps, a virtue for the landsman, but it can be disastrous for the mariner. Many a promising career at sea has ended on a note of impatience, since impatience breeds carelessness. Because of this human frailty, rules have been made, some written—others unwritten. It profits one to know them well." He paused and looked seaward again before continuing. "In the ice season, north of the fortieth parallel in the western ocean, Mr. Fanshaw, you proceed with caution." He gave his beard a final caressing stroke and started walking briskly toward the chartroom. He stopped as his hand started for the door, then went to his beard again.

"The sea possibly might be compared to a woman, Mr. Fanshaw," he called out, "except that where women are concerned, a sailor is usually north of forty. It pays to proceed carefully." The chartroom door opened, then closed gently.

The mate was certain that he heard a chuckle from the wheelhouse. He strode in on the pretense of checking the course and looked hard at the quartermaster. That individual was staring straight ahead, unsmiling. Mr. Fanshaw swore silently. Probably the whole blasted ship knew about Rosie now.

Just after seven bells, the quartermaster asked, "Do you notice anything on the port bow, sir?"

Mr. Fanshaw looked. It was a fairly clear night and starlight danced along the slow-running swells. "Can't say I see anything unusual," he replied sharply.

"Looks like it could be ice blink, sir."

"Ice blink!" The mate peered again. It was barely possible that the rim of the sky just over the horizon to port was a shade lighter than the rest of the heavens. But he wasn't sure. And, the longer he looked, the less likely it seemed.

"You keep your mind on the course," he said abruptly. "I know ice blink when I see it."

"Aye, aye sir."

At the next blast of the *False Bay's* whistle, Mr. Fanshaw listened intently. He could hear the steady thumping of the vessel's engines, the hissing swish of the sea along her steel skin, and the occasional weird creaking of her beams and deck gear. But he heard no echo. He examined the horizon again, this time through the glass, just as a vagrant cloudbank drifted

across the bow. "Ice blink!" he muttered. "If that was ice blink, then I'm a walrus."

He knew that if he reported the incident, Captain Colby undoubtedly would order the ship at half-speed and change the course so that they wouldn't sight Ambrose Light for another week. That was the trouble with the old fossil; too many rules, too much caution. Running the ship like he was walking on eggs. Just why the owners kept such an old fussybudget on the payroll was a constant and infuriating mystery to Mr. Fanshaw.



HIS irritation had begun with sailing day in New York, when he came aboard to ready the *False Bay* for sea. Mr. Blount, the second officer, warned him, "The skipper ain't aboard yet. Nice little guy when you get to know him, but touchy as a goose about rules an' details."

"Thanks," Mr. Fanshaw replied. "But this isn't the first ship I been mate in." He was in a reasonably pleasant mood, having just returned from Coney Island where he had presented Rosie with her engagement ring—obtained by a down payment of one hundred dollars, with another hundred due and payable when the *False Bay* returned to New York. Showing Rosie a good time had depleted his savings with amazing rapidity and he'd had to dig deep and even hock his sea-books so as to swing the ring deal. But her delighted squeals of happiness and her resounding farewell kisses were ample repayment.

The stowage of general merchandise completed, the mate went about his task of getting the ship ready for her voyage with youthful zest. He checked the hatch-cover tarps, saw that the cargo booms were shipped and lashed in their cradles, and the spare lines neatly coiled and drying out for stowage. On the bridge, he examined the navigating gear and even cleared the whistle's throat. He overlooked nothing; had, in fact, just mastheaded the flags when Captain Colby mounted the companion to the bridge. Mr. Fanshaw figured he'd done a job. He said, smartly, "Everything shipshape, sir."

"Very good, Mr. Fanshaw," Captain Colby said quietly. Then, squinting aloft, he said, "Just one thing, however." He pointed to the sailing flag. "The blue peter appears a trifle frayed in the lower right-hand corner."

The mate looked up. "So it is, sir," he said. "But it will get by this time."

Captain Colby began stroking his beard, slowly and gently. "Get by, Mr. Fanshaw?" he said mildly. "I don't particularly like that expression. I suggest that you eliminate it from your vocabulary while you are aboard my ship. You don't 'get by' at sea. You watch the little things so that they never add up to big ones."

"But Captain, I don't see how a frayed flag could—"

"Perhaps you will, some day." The captain's voice hadn't changed in pitch but it had a hard edge to it. "Haul down the blue peter, Mr. Fanshaw, and replace it with a new one. We don't sail until it's done."

The *False Bay* was well out to sea when the second mate told Mr. Fanshaw, "Cap'n Colby's got the reputation of never ever scratchin' the paint off of any ship he's commanded. An' he means to keep that record."

"He's throwin' the rule-book at me already," Mr. Fanshaw complained bitterly. "Asked me if I knew Article I of the International rules on lights. Schoolboy stuff."

Mr. Blount laughed. "An' you remembered it?"

"Sure. I got that when I went up for my first ticket—show your lights, sunset to sunrise, an' don't show any other lights except those in the rules."

"That's just the beginnin', mister," the second said. "You'd better get out the book when you're off watch."

"You mean to say he's goin' to keep that stuff up the whole voyage?" demanded the mate incredulously.

"He always does when he ships a new officer," replied Mr. Blount.

"Well, in the first place, I didn't bring my books with me—" remembering how he'd hocked them for Rosie's ring. "Besides, I know my trade. I got my master's papers an' what's good enough for the Commission ought to be good enough for him too."

"It won't be," Mr. Blount said realistically. "He figures that a man is apt to forget the rules when he needs 'em most, which might cause an accident an' smear his record. He's takin' no chances."

"Well, he can't stick me," growled the mate, and went to his cabin to start composing another letter to Rosie.



THE following evening, when Captain Colby finished writing his lengthy night orders, he came out of the chartroom and said, "Mr. Fanshaw, do you know the International rules for side lights?"

The mate gritted his teeth but managed, "Yes sir. Green light to starboard, red light to port, screened from the bow."

"What about the arc?"

Mr. Fanshaw fumbled with his memory desperately. He was silent for a long moment; then sighing with relief, he said, "Unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of ten compass points. It has to be fixed to throw the beam from right ahead to two points abaft the beam. That goes for port and starboard lights."

"Very good, Mr. Fanshaw." The captain's

voice was that of a pleased schoolmaster. When he had gone, the mate got out his handkerchief and wiped the beads of sweat from his brow. Well, he'd come out of that one, all right; but the more he thought about it, the madder he got. Why, he was on a blasted school-ship. The next thing you knew, the skipper would be making him stand in a corner if he didn't know his lessons.

He'd get off the *False Bay* in Liverpool—no, he couldn't do that. He had Rosie to think about now, and jumping ship in a foreign port wouldn't do at all. His career was more important than it ever had been, what with Rosie and maybe, later, a few little tykes to support. He'd simply have to tough it out until he got back to New York; then he'd request a transfer.

It was the next night that Mr. Fanshaw's head of steam rose almost to the bursting point. He saw the Old Man coming and instinctively braced himself as if expecting a blow.

"Mr. Fanshaw." Methodically, the captain stroked his beard. "This one is probably easy for you: Article 2, masthead light for steam vessels underway."

The mate swallowed an uncomplimentary epithet and replied, "Yes sir. Ships over twenty feet wide carry a white light on the foremast, at a height above the hull not less than her breadth. Or, if she don't carry a foremast, somewhere in the forepart of the vessel." He hesitated. "The light has to show over an arc of the horizon of—of—" Mr. Fanshaw knew the answer. It had been on the tip of his tongue but, somehow, it had slipped off into the depths of his memory and, the more he concentrated, the more elusive it became. Was it twenty or thirty points? "Thirty points," he said hoarsely.

Captain Colby shook his head regretfully. "Twenty points of the compass so that it will throw light ten points each side of the bow."

When the third mate relieved him at eight bells, Mr. Fanshaw called at Mr. Blount's cabin. "Mind if I borrow your Bowditch?" he asked casually.

"Here you are." The second mate handed over the manual. "How are you and the Old Man hitting it off?" he asked a little maliciously.

Mr. Fanshaw growled something unintelligible but obviously profane and slammed the door as he went out.



WHEN the *False Bay* pulled up the Mersey and tied up, the mate had cooled off somewhat. Captain Colby, his ship safely berthed in Canada Basin, didn't spend much time aboard and Mr. Fanshaw breathed freely, relishing his release. But he felt as if someone had been sawing at his nerves with a dull knife. He needed relaxation and knew that the waterfront pubs, with their grog and jolly barmaids,

offered a quick nepenthe. It was the mariner's heritage: the long days at sea, fasting from life; then the instinctive and sudden desire to retrieve the living that had been lost.

But—there was Rosie. He certainly didn't want to mar their beautiful relationship by even thinking about barmaids and grog. Besides, he couldn't afford it. The honeymoon would cost money; and later, their little home. And then there was Rosie's little brother who had to finish his schooling. So, when the third mate suggested, "How about giving the Blue Anchor a whirl tonight? Liveliest pub in town and the best-looking barmaids—" Mr. Fanshaw's iron will prevailed. He had no intention of sacrificing the permanent happiness which awaited him for a temporary fling.

Instead, he spent his time ashore riding the tramways to various points of interest in Liverpool. He visited Prince's Park and the botanic gardens in Wavertree. He saw the old townhouse in Castle Street and inspected St. George's Hall and the Liverpool Cathedral. When, in his lonely civic voyagings, his course took him too close to an inviting public house, he resolutely turned his gaze in another direction and thought of Rosie. That is, he did until the night before sailing.

"One glass of ale." He told himself that with determination. "Just one. Surely Rosie wouldn't mind that."

The following morning, when the quarter-master banged on his cabin door, Mr. Fanshaw forced his eyelids apart slowly, as if fearful to look upon the world which awaited him. He was definitely in pain, most of it being concentrated topside and, each time he moved, his sufferings were augmented a thousand-fold. Slowly, he reached for the water-jug and drained it. Then, impelled by a dreadful premonition, he dragged his pants from the deck, pulled out his wallet and examined it bleakly. Empty. The ten pounds he'd had left from the draw against his pay was gone.

His groan trailed off feebly. Then, like a murderer returning to the scene of his crime, he sought to remember the events of the previous evening. He recalled strolling into the Blue Anchor and ordering his first ale. And the second. After that, his memory began registering a fantastic jumble of sounds and faces and fragments of conversation. "E's a jolly bloke, ain't 'e?" "Sure, I'll 'ave another." "You look like Rosie, my wunnerful Rosie."

Mr. Fanshaw was no happier when the *False Bay* swung out of the Mersey and headed for the open sea. Not only did his conscience nag him, but Captain Colby had resumed the maddening nautical ABC's. The mate took it, not too graciously, but he took it. He consoled himself with the thought that arrival in New York would see the end of Captain Colby and the *False Bay*, as far as he was concerned. There

would be only Rosie; all his, signed on for life. Each morning he impatiently crossed off another date on his calendar and looked at the circle he had drawn around The Day.

It was when the nor'wester blew up three days out that Mr. Fanshaw's impatient anger began to mount. The radio operator had reported the storm and the falling glass confirmed it. Captain Colby was taking no chances. He gave the mate his orders, leaving nothing to the imagination. "Sound all tanks and bilges, examine stays, shrouds, and booms. See to the oil tanks and have the oil bags brought out. Close all deadlights, break out fiddley tarpaulins—" And finally, with the freighter secure and snug, the captain gave the order to leave to.

The mate, in no mood for delay, said, "Look here, Captain. I admit this is a stiff gale, but it isn't any West Indian hurricane or China Sea typhoon. It's just another nor'wester, an'—"

"Just another nor'wester can do considerable damage, Mr. Fanshaw," replied the captain quietly. "We'll ride it out."

And so, the *False Bay* rode it out like a duck and resumed her course, hours later, without a mark on her.



AND now, it was ice. "Imaginary ice," Mr. Fanshaw snarled when the third mate arrived on the bridge to relieve him.

But, at the next blast of the whistle, Mr. Jackson said in a startled voice, "That's not imaginary, mister. You hear that echo?" The mate listened. He heard a muffled repeat.

"Call the captain," he said automatically. "I'll get the stopwatch and time it." But Captain Colby was already on the bridge.

"Stop engines," he ordered.

The engine-room telegraph jangled and the freighter slid through the sea without power. Then: "Reverse engines." The ship shuddered as the propeller took hold. When the whistle blew, the mate started the stopwatch, stopping it when the echo returned.

"Four seconds, thirty," he said. "Multiplied by 550 is—" He fumbled with a pencil.

"Twenty-four hundred and seventy-five feet," snapped Captain Colby. "And that's too close for comfort. Mr. Fanshaw, you didn't see any other ice signs?"

"I—"

"Listen to that!" They heard a faint crackling, now, like the sound of distant breakers. Then came the lookout's shout: "Iceberg on port bow."

They saw it, now; a dark, menacing mass, glinting occasionally in the starlight as it moved ponderously. The second mate was on the bridge, too. "Compute our exact position, Mr. Blount," Captain Colby said. "We'll have to report this berg. Meantime, we'll take a south-

erly course at slow speed." He started for the wheelhouse just as the radio operator came bounding onto the bridge.

"SOS, sir," Sparks said breathlessly. "The *Avonmouth*. Struck ice and making water fast. Here's her position. She's in a bad way. Lost most of her boats in that storm we hit."

Captain Colby took the message into the chartroom. "Small Green Star vessel," he said. "Passengers and freight." He leaned over the chart and quickly computed the stricken craft's position. "Puts her north of us a few hours' run. Tell her we're coming, Sparks. And let me know what other ships are in this area."

"Mister Fanshaw," Captain Colby said when the *False Bay* was underway again, "muster the crew and unlash and swing out all boats. We might need them for rescue work." He issued his orders in the same quiet tone, seldom varying in pitch. But nothing was overlooked. Lifelines and life preservers were readied and handy. The line-throwing cannon was loaded, the line neatly coiled alongside of it. In the saloon, the steward was laying out first-aid equipment and blankets.

Sparks reported, "Nothing closer than we are, sir. *Silverado's* about two hundred miles east. She's nearest."

"Our job, then," Captain Colby said. "Keep me posted on her condition, Sparks."

They saw her rockets first; red balls of fire areing high into the night sky. Then, her lights appeared, blinking yellow on the horizon. "Every man keep a lookout for ice," the captain cautioned. "We can't do her any good if we hit anything." One small berg forced a change in course, but otherwise the freighter sliced through clear water.

The searchlights were manned as they came closer to the *Avonmouth*. They could see her bow inclined and her stern well down in the sea. She was in open water. Apparently, she had slid past the berg after she hit. One lifeboat was visible in the water and was being rowed clear of the wreck. Then they could see the frantic people jamming the decks, waving to them.

Mr. Fanshaw said grimly, "They haven't a chance. She'll go down like a rock in less than twenty minutes. We're too late."

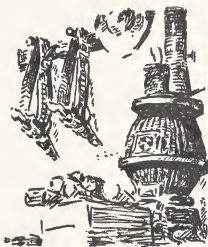
Mr. Blount nodded agreement. "We might pick some of them up. But not many. Icy water and suction will see to that."



CAPTAIN COLBY was staring hard at the *Avonmouth* through his binoculars when Sparks appeared. "She wants to know what you're going to do, sir," he said. "They say they can't stay afloat much longer."

The captain took another look at the wrecked ship as the mate came up.

(Continued on page 143)



WINTER DRIFT

By
HAROLD O.
WEIGHT



HE HAILED, and old Latigo told him to fall off and stay a while, and he put up his horse and came into the bunk-house.

We knew what he was as soon as the lamp-light hit him. But in those days when a man asked for food and shelter, he got it, no matter who he was or what he was running from. That was range law, and on the Lazy Seven it was the Old Man's only religion.

The stranger was small and dark and built solid, and he was all wound up like a spring. First off you thought of a rattlesnake. Only you wasn't sure if this one would buzz first, and you didn't feel like finding out.

He took off his blanket-coat and he was all in black, with a big black hat shoved back on his head and showing dark curls underneath. The hat had a high cone-shaped top and shaggy fuzz and silver thread, the kind they wear



along the Mexican border, and it looked like he hadn't stopped much since he left there. But he hung his gunbelt on a wall-peg before he came over to where we was playing seven-up, and that was all we asked.

He wasn't dressed right for Montana, specially that winter of '86 and '87. He got with his back close to the red-hot stove, and you could almost see him thaw and the heat loosen the saddle-stiffness.

When we reached the valley, the drift was on . . . you couldn't see head nor tail in the wind-whipped snow.

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFF

Squinty begged and old Latigo—he was foreman—dealt three more and turned up a new trump. He picked up his cards and looked across at the stranger. "How's it outside?"

"I figger a norther's a-coming," the stranger said. A norther's what a Texan calls a blizzard.

Latigo thought he had a weather-leg. So he rubbed the joint and shook his head. "Not for forty-eight hours anyhow." Sometimes his leg worked and sometimes it didn't, but he only remembered the times it did.

The stranger turned his haw side to the stove. "How far is Canada?" he asked.

"Mebbe two hundred miles straight," Latigo answered.

The stranger took the stovelid off and tossed in another chunk of pine. He just couldn't seem to get enough heat.

That was the winter when half the cattle on the range died, what with thaws to weaken them, and freezes to ice over what little grass was left, and blizzards to kill the critters after they was starved. We were pretty much in love with the bunkhouse and the bunkhouse stove, that winter, and sometimes we wouldn't see neither for days. When a man sits down to a big beefsteak, he don't think that somebody rode blizzards and froze, and maybe died to bring it to him.



WE'D had a week of pretty good weather when the stranger came—clear and quiet, with the ridges clean enough so the cattle could get some forage, and the thermometer hanging halfway between thirty and thirty-five below like it was frozen too. We got a chance to catch up on our sleep and our grub and to stay warm for hours at a time. It was the end of January, I remember, or the first of February. We were feeling pretty cheerful, not knowing what was yet to come before the last Chinook really brought in the spring.

I was only fifteen then, but I was husky as a man and earning a man's wages of twenty-five a month and board. Fifty-nine years is a long time, but I remember everything clear like it was a picture in front of me. Clearer than anything that happened last week. Maybe it was because I was so young then. Maybe it was because he was the first killer I'd ever seen close up.

I remember the sound of Cookie's horn, and his yell of "Grub pile!" I remember how the cold slapped me when I went out the door, and how it cut my lungs like a knife when I breathed, and the jangle of our spurs on the frozen ground as we walked up to the main shack. I remember the crackle of the cook-stove, and the steamy air filled with the smells of beef and beans and hot coffee. And Cookie growling "Fly at it!" and the good sight of healthy men enjoying the food they'd earned

by their sweat. Most of all I remember the stranger, putting away grub with a quiet rush that made you think maybe he'd been a long time without.

A man don't talk much when there's food on the table, but after we got back to the bunkhouse, old Latigo let his belt out a couple of notches and asked the stranger what handle he wanted tacked onto him.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "Most folks call me 'Kid,'" he answered.

Latigo looked at me. "We already got one Kid. Maybe you hail from someplace we can name you by."

The stranger looked up. "Arizona Territory," he said, short and sullen.

Latigo frowned. A grub line rider is supposed to pay for his meals with general gossip of the country he comes from. "No offense, Arizona," he said. "I wasn't prying."

He picked up a mail-order catalogue and I got my new saddlery company catalogue which had come out with the last mail, two months ago. We started reading back and forth, passing time until our stomachs would let us go to bed. And I started talking again about the one-hundred dollar double-rig saddle with llama skin pockets and twenty-six inch tapaderos I was going to get, come spring. I never did get that saddle. I never had the hundred dollars long enough after I hit town to send for it. I still don't have it.

Arizona squatted by the table facing the door, with his back against the log wall. He sat there, bunching and shuffling our flabby deck of cards in an absent-minded sort of way. Squinty sat down opposite him and said, "Deal 'em out." Squinty thought he was the best poker player in Montana, and I reckon he wasn't far from the worst. Every time he went broke he blamed his luck while he was at the table, and a marked deck when he was far enough away to be safe.

It was the same with all of us, though. If it wasn't cards it was whiskey, or the girls, or buying up all the fancy food in town. We always came back busted after a day or two, but happy and figuring we'd had the biggest time of our lives.



SHORTY and Texas Charlie sat down at the table and Arizona said, "What'll it be?"

"Draw," said Squinty.

Arizona took off his gloves and his hands were soft and white like they belonged to a young girl. He shuffled the cards like he was talking to them. Shorty cut, and Arizona dealt them out.

Inside half an hour, most of the chips were in front of Arizona, and he was dealing off the top of the deck. But you could see his mind was only part on the game. He was listening.

Not to the noises in the bunkhouse—the greasy slither of the cards and Squinty's mutterings, and the snap of pineknobs in the stove, and Red's snoring and me and Latigo gabbling over the catalogues. But beyond that—beyond the ranch even—to something he couldn't possibly hear but knew he had to.

Then Squinty, who had just drew five new cards, cussed and banged the whole hand down on the table.

Arizona acted like when you squeeze a dead rattler's tail and he strikes at you—like it was his muscles doing it, not him. He was crouching on his feet, with the bench tipped over and his hand slapped to his thigh where his gun ought to have been. He looked around at us sitting stiff and silent. He righted the bench and sat down slow, his face twitching.

"I was thinking of something else," he said. He looked over at Squinty. "Anything wrong with the cards or the dealing?"

Squinty swallowed hard and picked up his cards. "It's just my luck," he said.

I thought I heard it first, the sound of shod hoofs on frozen ground. But Arizona had stopped dealing and was staring at the door.

Then it came, crisp and sharp, "Hello the house!"

Latigo sat up with a snort. He looked at Arizona, who was half on his feet, looking at his gun on the wall. Arizona shifted his eyes to Latigo, stared at him a minute, then sat down and went on with the deal.

The call came again, kind of impatient. A man was supposed to stay on his horse until he was invited off.

Latigo opened the door. "Climb down, stranger," he called. "You can take care of your horse yonder."

The poker game had stopped and Squinty slipped out of what might be the line of fire. The stove kept popping and the bunk squeaked as Red shifted around, but us human beings were almighty quiet for the next few minutes.

The door swung wide and a big, square-built man filled it. He had a face square as the rest of him, and a gray mustache and hair gray at the edges and his voice was deep and pleasant as he said, "Howdy, boys. It's a comfortable night to be inside."

We didn't say a word. All we could see was the silver star shining on his front. The sheriff felt the tension, and his eyes cracked around the room and hit full into Arizona. His right arm stiffened and hung about an inch from his gun. Arizona looked at his gunbelt on the wall, then at the sheriff and then at Latigo. Then he bunched the cards and started shuffling.

The sheriff turned toward Latigo. "A fellow guest, I reckon?"

Latigo said "Yes," in a flat voice that didn't give encouragement either way.

The sheriff could have taken Arizona, and we

wouldn't have interfered. Our hospitality wouldn't have gone far enough to face the law for a killer, and he knew it. But he was a range sheriff and he had accepted range hospitality, and that bound the one who received it as well as the one who gave it.

If he had ridden up and asked for a fugitive, he would have had grounds to take him. But when Latigo told him to light and he got off his horse, he was the guest of the Lazy Seven. So he turned around and walked across the room and hung his gunbelt beside Arizona's, and I started to breathe again.

Latigo's face creased in a smile. "If you sashay up to the main house, I reckon Cookie's got the bean pot on."



IT WAS past bedtime, and maybe a hard day coming, but none of us made a move to turn in. When the sheriff came back, it looked like hot food had done him plenty of good. He plumped down in Squinty's seat and signaled for some cards.

Arizona came out from behind his hand and gave the sheriff a slow smile. "Hunting somebody?" he asked.

The sheriff jerked his cigar around and stared straight at Arizona. "Yeah," he said. "A killer that calls himself the Yuma Kid. Held up Ordway bank in Arizona Territory and killed two men getting away. One of them was my deputy and best friend."

Arizona took the makings out of his pocket and built himself a one-handed smoke, holding his cards with the other. When he got it working he looked at the sheriff and his eyes were hot and smoky. "Men that wear badges have to take chances."

The sheriff nodded his head slowly and looked down at his hand. "The Kid's good at covering his tracks. I've trailed him better than a thousand miles. Every time I closed in, he'd slip away."

"Maybe the sheriff ain't so bad either," said Arizona. "Maybe the Kid figured he'd shook him off when he went through that bunch of cattle on the Musselshell."

The sheriff grinned at himself and at Arizona. "I clean lost the trail. I just headed in here because I needed grub." He looked straight at Arizona. "But I didn't see your tracks coming in."

"I circled," said Arizona. "Came in on the tracks another rider made."

"Then I come in the front way," the sheriff grunted. "It's kind of funny."

"It's your move, Sheriff Brandt," said Arizona. He wasn't looking at the cards.

The sheriff stared at his hand without seeing it. Then he threw it down. "I got nothing, I'm going to catch myself some shuteye."

Arizona yawned. "This'll be the first night I

can sleep without one eye looking back the way I came."

They took off their boots and pants and crawled in, the sheriff over me and Arizona across the room. The rest of us did likewise. It was quiet and dark, except for the dull red of the stove and a small spot of red that dimmed and brightened in Arizona's bunk. It was too quiet. I remember thinking I was never going to get to sleep.

Then I woke with a jolt, with a couple of black things waving in front of my face. Before I yelled, I figured they was the sheriff's feet. I heard something slipping quietly along the floor, and I saw a shape I knew was Arizona outlined against the lighter black of the window. Six feet further on, his gun and the sheriff's hung on the wall, and I waited for him to start for them.

But after a while he headed back for his bunk, and when he got to it, the sheriff struck a sulphur match and I could hear him sucking on his cigar. You could see the whole room faintly in the blue light. There was eyes shining in every bunk, and I saw Latigo stuffing his old six-shooter back under his pillow.

Arizona looked at the sheriff with a smile at the ends of his mouth. "The stars are covered," he said.

"Yeah," said the sheriff. The match went out and his feet dragged back up into the bunk.

Next time I woke, the wind was snarling over the roof. Latigo groaned and I knew his weather-leg was working. The boys started cussing and squirming. I wished I could pull the blankets higher and lay there till it was over. But I was the youngest hand and had to get the fire going.

Then I went out to string a blizzard line to the main shack, wearing everything I could put on, including three pairs of socks. It was still dark when I got outside. There wasn't any snow yet, except what the wind was picking up, but that wind started freezing your face and working in from there.

We swallowed our grub quick and drunk off the hot coffee we could hold. Arizona and the sheriff sat opposite each other at the table, went back to the bunkhouse together, put on their guns together and came out, side by side, to where we was saddling up.



THE horses were uneasy, knowing what the day would bring, and liking it lots less than we did. Pretty soon the air was full of flying heels and cussing and the funny sound a horse makes when you kick the wind out of his belly and try to tighten up the back cinch before he can suck it in.

Arizona started saddling up his horse, the biggest, blackest stallion I ever saw, and Sheriff Brandt went to work on his California sorrel.

Latigo looked at the two of them. "You ain't moving out in this weather?" he asked.

The sheriff looked at Arizona.

"It's good weather," said Arizona. "But I figured to ride with you. You look short-handed."

The corner of the sheriff's mouth twitched, but he stuck. "I've worked cattle myself," he said.

Latigo's face brightened. He figured that Arizona was just looking for a chance to break, but any help in a blizzard is more than welcome.

It would have been sun-up when we left the ranch, if there had been any sun. You could still see a hundred feet, but there was nothing but driving snow and the tops of willows marking the coulees. The main herd was bunched across the Sunbowns, and we had to cross the foothills to get to them in Blackhawk Valley. It was three hours before we got where we could see them, and it seemed twice that long. But we should have been three hours earlier. The cattle was bunched together in a black blotch that went farther than we could see—maybe four thousand of them.

All they needed was for some fool to start downwind, and a drift would be on. I don't know of any cowhand who's seen a winter drift in a blizzard that don't get a spasm in his belly when he thinks about it. It's like a stampede, only it starts slower and is harder to stop. It's like a man with a fever, out of his head and set to do something, come hell or high water. The cattle scrunch together, moaning, with heads hanging, until it gets so cold that what little brain they have is froze. Then one of them starts moving away from the wind, and the others follow him and they keep moving until they die or the wind stops.

Downwind from us was Blackhawk Lake, with ice that would hold one or fifty or maybe a hundred head. But when thousands of cattle push the ones ahead onto thinner ice . . . Looking at the others, I could tell they was thinking the same thing, and knowing that the only real chance we had was to break it up before it started.

Latigo shouted, "If we get them moving, drive for Black Canyon." But right then the blizzard hit, and in a minute you could hardly see your horse's head. When the first shock lifted, I saw that Sheriff Brandt was right alongside Arizona, keeping the sorrel's nose at the black's withers. As for the valley and the cattle, you couldn't see either. All you could do was keep working cross wind and hope you'd get there sometime.

When we reached the valley, the drift was on. You couldn't see head nor tail in the wind-whipped snow, only a widening triangle of miserable critters with heads down and ice on their lips. Shoulder to shoulder, massed solid.

they was holding true to the wind and heading for the lake. We tried to swing them, like you do a column on the trail, but they wouldn't follow. We shot the lead steers and hollered enough to spook a dozen herds, but they just tromped on over the fallen ones.

We pulled together to talk and Latigo asked, "Do you think a wedge would do it?" We didn't think so, but we knew we had to try it.

So we lined up at the head of the column, and drove in our spurs and went for them. Hitting drifting cattle is like running into a brick wall with spears. In about one minute, the outfit's wedge was as scattered and about as useful as a load of buckshot in a grizzly. Most of the boys were already out of sight in the howling sleet, carried along by the drift. All I could see was Squinty about two hundred steers to the left, and Arizona and the sheriff near the edge to my right.



I SHOUTED and whooped and lay about with my quirt. But it was like shouting at the spring flood. Soon I was so tired I could hardly lift the whip, and I could feel

Buckskin weakening under me. I began to remember stories about cowhands who had ridden into drifts and got so tired they couldn't get out and had gone on with the drift till they died. I couldn't see nothing but cattle on all sides. I quit quirling the cattle and laid it onto Buckskin and tried to pull out of the drift, moving slantwise with the current.

Buckskin was tiring fast, and I thought of all those hoofs tramping the snow to ooze and wondered if the boys would even be able to find where I fell. I wanted to pray, but all I could think of was "Now I lay me down to sleep" and it didn't seem the right place for that. Then the last of the drift passed and we was standing on the blackened muck, alone except for a few mother-cows nosing their fallen calves.

Then I heard a horse scream up ahead. There ain't nothing I know of quite so terrible as the sound a horse makes when it knows it's going to die. This carried upwind against the blizzard. I forgot I was tired and drove Buckskin after the drift. I caught up with Squinty and Charlie and then Shorty and Red. Then we were up near the head of the drift again, and we saw Arizona and the sheriff on the far side, riding back and forth and looking out into the mass of cattle.

Out there, closer to their side, was old Latigo, hanging onto his saddle. We could see by the way his face was twisted that he was hurt, and we could see his horse was done for. One of the longhorns had found room, somehow, to ram the horn into the roan's belly, and the press, closing in, had driven it home. Only the steer's horn, which he couldn't get out, and the

jam of cattle was keeping the horse on his feet.

While we watched, the sheriff sunk spurs into his sorrel and smashed in where he saw a little opening. Latigo kept motioning him back, but he worked his way through to where he could reach out and just grab Latigo's outstretched hands. Then Brandt pulled him out of the saddle and across the cattle between and onto his own horse.

Latigo's horse twisted his neck around, when he felt Latigo leave him, and tried to turn to follow. Then he went down and took the steer with him and the drift went over them. Sheriff Brandt headed his sorrel back, and forced it into the massed cattle, and for a little while he made slantwise progress toward the edge. But he was in the thick of the drift, and the horse was carrying double, and worn out already. We saw he wasn't going to make it.

The leaders were almost to the shore of the lake, and it would be too late by the time we went around back of the herd and got up to the front. Besides which, there wasn't much we could do then. So we just shouted advice to the sheriff and he shouted back, warning us to keep out. Then we shut up, and he did too. All you could hear was the low moaning of the cattle, and the snarl of the blizzard, and we drifted along like a pack of coyotes waiting for a cow to drop.

Then I noticed Arizona. He had ridden ahead to where a little creek slanted into the lake. He was sitting his horse on the far bank. I remembered what it would mean to him with Sheriff Brandt dead in the lake, and it looked like he was getting himself a good grandstand seat for it. The lead cattle had already climbed the creek-bank and had put their hoofs onto the rough surface of the lake ice. In a couple of minutes, Latigo and the sheriff would reach that place, and then it was only a question of how much weight the ice would stand, and how far it would stand it.

The horse came to the creekbend and down. It wasn't much of a rise, but it looked like he was going to fall back and that would finish it. I could see that the sheriff was staring at Arizona and Arizona was staring back. But the horse made it up the bank and it and its riders went past.

Then a black thunderbolt hit the drift. I saw Arizona's fixed face as he leaned down from the saddle, gun in hand. He hit the cattle just coming up the bank, and as they tumbled back, he shot into the ones behind. The dead bodies and upset animals fell into the creekbend and for a minute the mass behind hesitated and swerved.

In that brief time Arizona reached the sheriff and his horse, and swung the great stallion around. The sheriff spurred his sorrel, and they came back, the Kid acting as shield above the staggering horse, driving his stallion into

the first of the wave that climbed over the fallen ones. Then the two of them broke free and the drift closed behind them.



LATIGO had a broken leg, but he was sitting up on the snow swearing, when we got there. He was watching the cattle, tears dripping from his eyes and freezing as they ran. We heard the crackling of the ice, and then the crashing and bellowing as the first cattle broke through.

Squinty looked at Latigo's face and said harshly, "Come on, we got to get you out of here and to a doctor."

We started to look for branches to fix a sled, but while we worked, the wind stopped for the first time. On the edge of the lake, the cattle moved slower and then stopped, moaning and bellowing.

Latigo swore at us. "Tie me onto a horse and get after those cattle. I can get back all right."

So we roped his leg with branch splints so it wouldn't break no more, and he started off toward the home ranch.

It was near midnight when we got back, and the blizzard was blowing again, and we had to use the rope to hang onto when we got off the horses. The grub tasted like sawdust and we was pretty near too tired to sleep.

But we'd shoved maybe two thirds of the herd up in Black Canyon where it anyhow had a chance.

Come morning, the sun was shining as if it had never thought of anything else in its life. After breakfast, Arizona went over and got his gunbelt and buckled it on. He looked at the sheriff.

Sheriff Brandt lay back in his bunk and lit a cigar. "My horse got an awful workout yesterday," he said to the ceiling. "Reckon a little more rest will speed him on the trail. Figure I'll get after my man again about noon."

Latigo grinned at that, and I guess we all

felt better, even the sheriff. That was his way of clearing a debt off the slate.

Arizona went over to Latigo and slapped him on the good leg. "Keep your tail up," he said.

Old Latigo looked down at his wrapped-up leg and said, "Kid, there ain't no percentage in the game you're bucking."

Arizona was looking at Latigo, but beyond him, too. "Funny about them cattle," he said slowly. "Seemed like a good idea to them when they started drifting. It was bad where they were, and maybe it was better some place else. Maybe some of them knew they was heading wrong after they got started. But they was caught in the drift then."

He walked out and pretty soon we heard him riding away to the north.

After dinner Sheriff Brandt buckled on his gun and went over to Latigo too. "We do what we think we got to," he said. "Some of us just naturally think different."

We never saw either again, and we never knew how it turned out. But I'm kind of glad I don't know, because for nearly sixty years I've remembered them the way they was that day, both risking their lives for a man they hadn't seen twenty-four hours before.

They're both no doubt gone now, probably a long time. Men who lived by their guns, for or against the law, didn't live very long. And a whole way of life has gone with them.

But I'm glad I lived most of my life with men like that, who could sit down to a game of cards opposite a mortal enemy, out of respect for another's hospitality. Who only killed what they were aiming at, and didn't drag in a lot of people who didn't want no part of it.

Maybe there was a lot of killing then. But just as many die today, and fewer die free and walking their own way. Seems like the whole world is caught in a winter drift, and can't get out.



fusion and delay at one time to all British shipping that the government decided to prove the matter once and for all. They laid the keel of the test ship on a Friday, launched her on a Friday, started her on her maiden voyage on a Friday, and hired a captain named Friday to handle her. She was never heard from again—so, if true, that experiment was no help at all.

It is also scarcely a generation since whistling on board was sure to raise the ire of the older hands; and old women would sell magic knotted strings along the docks which, if you untied a knot, were certain to bring a favorable wind. They also sold cauls, those face veils of skin which children are sometimes born with, and which were said to be a sure charm against drowning. I've shipped with seamen myself who wore cauls in a special pouch round their neck, just as I've shipped with occasional old Scandinavians who would toss a coin into the sea on sailing day for luck.

But steam and all that it brought finally changed most things. Just as it changed the Great Ship, or rather sank it and returned Paradise to the ocean floor, alongside Davy Jones and his fabulous locker. I say returned because long before the Great Ship there was a very ancient legend of a vast palace under the waves (that of Poseidon and Amphitrite) and that legend appeared to have doubled back on itself and become something to comfort the shellbacks again when their floating Paradise vanished.



THE sundry Great Ships with their free grog, their free brothels and their delectable grub were not the only vessels that drifted around the seas our great-grandfathers sailed.

There were the hell-ships too, maintaining the natural balance that if mankind must create a Heaven he must also create his Hell. These ships had about as many different forms as the Great Ships, agreeing only in the one matter that they were sure death to sight and they came for the sailor's soul or to feast on his body. Some were only phantoms, like the classical *Flying Dutchman*, condemned to sail forever, manned by ghosts and always seen running head to wind. The *Flying Dutchman*, however, has some basis in fact as there actually was a vessel of that name, skippered by a very tough character named Vanderdecken or, according to my researches, a Captain Bernard Fokke, though as always when you get into legends there are disputes about all details. In any event a *Flying Dutchman* did sail and was never heard from again and was supposed to have been lost off Cape Horn, or rather placed under a curse off Cape Horn because her captain blasphemed God on account of adverse winds. This ghostly vessel became good material for several writers and so has been more or less immortalized.

The other ghostly ships are not quite so pleasant, as they were variously manned by howling man-dogs, fiery devils, one-eyed giants or, with the Ulysses siren touch, manned by beautiful women calling and beckoning sailors to their doom and changing to cannibalistic she-devils once the hypnotized crews were in their power. Some of them even made sure of their victims by wafting ghosts over to work with the doomed ship's crew, so that an honest A.B. furling a sail might suddenly find two or three men on the yard beside him with whom he'd certainly never signed. But, all in all, these horror ships were the predecessor of Davy Jones as much as the Great Ship was the predecessor of Fiddlers' Green. The picture of the old-time sailor becomes clearer when you perceive the fantastic world he lived in.

But if the customary visit of "Neptune" over the ship's bows when crossing the Line is about all that remains of Fiddlers' Green, just as Davy Jones is the unburied ghost of the ghost ships, there are many other legends and customs that have completely gone into oblivion. There was, for instance, the custom of "burning the dead horse."

This happened when a vessel was a month at sea. Usually a horse was made out of old canvas, stuffed with old rope and tar, hoisted to the yardarm (the weather being appropriate) and at night with many mournful chanteys and various ceremonies, set on fire and cut adrift to float away. This custom was because nearly all hands on signing drew a month's pay in advance (which was usually spent on a last spree) so the men figured that for a month they had been working for "a dead horse," and the ceremony of burning the animal was a means of celebrating their getting back on pay again. This was certainly the meaning of the ceremony so far as old seamen went, but there is also a possibility the custom is in reality a somewhat perverted throwback to ancient times when the Vikings at sea sacrificed a horse to Odin, asking for good luck for the voyage.

The "dead horse" ceremony, like the boarding by "Neptune" and his "court" Christmas Day, and sundry other occasions, depending upon the nationality of the ship, were greatly cherished by the windship men, if only because they were breaks in the monotony of hard work and loneliness. And of course the extent to which they were a break always depended upon what sort of captain was in charge. But that is something even the modern sailor knows.

Among other legends all but forgotten (though this one still pops up occasionally) was the one about having thirteen men at the foc'sle table, in the days before everyone had a private cabin(!)—and I was on one ship

(Continued on page 142)

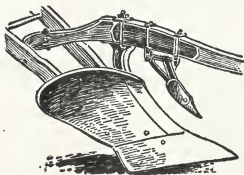


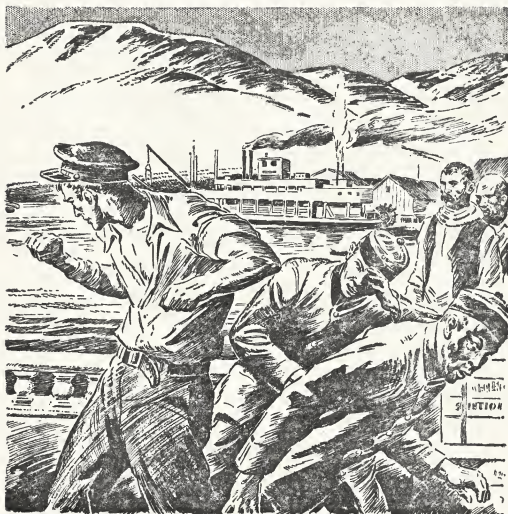
DOWNRIVER

ILLUSTRATED BY
V. E. FYLES

PASSAGE

By
STEVE HAIL





"Get out!" snarled Tuckey, brandishing his gold-headed cane. "Get off this vessel, Sudden, before I have the hands throw you off!"

CAPTAIN JEDEDIAH SUDDEN of the Sacramento River packet, *Solano*, rang the engines off, cast a critical eye at the deck hands cleating a bow line, and stepped out of the towering pilothouse onto the texas deck. He jerked his battered pilot's cap to a more protective angle and blinked slowly to accustom his eyes to the blinding glare of the mid-day California sun.

The first sight to meet his clearing vision was the ever increasing and all-too-familiar ranks of idle river craft gathering slime and rot along the low levees of Sutter's Embarcadero.

It was God's truth, Jed told himself bitterly, that the Sacramento had changed. The tides of

fortune on this rapidly tarnishing river of gold were definitely on the ebb. His browned hands, calloused by the wheelspokes of a dozen paddle steamers throughout the course of as many years, searched his pockets for a solacing cheroot. Those idle sidewheelers now . . .

An animal-like sound from above and behind him jogged his mind back to immediate problems. He turned unhurriedly and regarded the two Chinamen hanging by their queues to a nearby jackstay. Deliberately he turned away, extracted the ragged, black cheroot from his breast pocket and touched it off with a sulphur stick only slightly more malodorous than the native cigarro. He puffed tentatively for a

moment, then eyed the dangling Chinese for any apparent signs of repentance. Finally, satisfied, he drew a sheath knife from his rawhide belt, cut the lashings binding their wrists and with a single quick slash severed their long black hair close to the rope stay.

The Chinese dropped squealing to the deck, darted one unified look of terror at Jed, and scampered for the companionway to the lower decks. Jed grinned, aiming a booted foot at the spot immediately below a flying shirt-tail.

"Very amusing, Captain! Extremely entertaining!"

The harsh voice behind Sudden did not sound amused or entertained.

Jed swung around to face the beefy, apoplectic visage of Weldon Tuckey, owner of the *Solano* and a half score of other associated paddle steamers.

Tuckey, feet planted wide, gold-headed cane in the crook of his arm, and thumbs hooked into the pockets of the flowered waistcoat covering his protuberant stomach, regarded Jed with eyes that matched the heat of his complexion.

"Well?" Tuckey demanded. "Speak up, Captain. Explain this—this . . ." His words stuttered off after the scrambling Chinese.

Jed tried a grin, shrugged. "Caught 'em rifling passenger baggage," he explained calmly. He rolled back a shirted sleeve, exhibiting a blood-clotted bandage covering his forearm. "One of 'em tried a knife—before I took it away from him."

"We have miners' courts to settle affairs like this, Captain Sudden."

Jed's cool gray eyes kindled for an instant angrily. "A miners' court would've hanged 'em, too," he reminded the other. "But it would have been by their necks—'til dead. I don't believe in killing, Tuckey. Not even thieving Chinese scullery boys."

The packet owner ignored the explanation. There was only the slight lifting of his fat shoulders before he said, "I believe I've had enough of you, Captain Sudden. Pack up. You're finished!"

Jed was silent for a second, startled at the suddenness of it, although knowing for weeks that it was coming. He nodded then, slowly, understandingly. "Could it be," he asked icily, "that you no longer want to pay a fair price for piloting, now that"—he angled the point of his lean jaw toward the triple-rowed lines of lesser river craft bordering the levee—"now that you've run every independent operator off the river with your bankrupting fares and freight rates?"

The color heightened still more in Tuckey's florid cheeks, a sneer twitched at the corners of his thick-lipped mouth. "Get out!" he snarled. "Get off this vessel, Sudden, before I have the hands throw you off."

Jed nodded again, soberly, but made no move to leave. "Make your profit while you can, Tuckey," he went on evenly, "before the rest of your greedy ilk kill the golden goose." His head swung in a quarter circle, his chin jerking upstream toward the towering Sierras dim in the east. "I'll give you two years, maybe three, before the hydraulic diggings up there close every channel in the Sacramento. There won't be water enough in midstream to float a—" The corner of his eye caught the swift bludgeoning arc of the descending cane.

His left arm, the good arm, went up and the blow fell on the flat of his shoulder. The shoulder sagged just enough to give weight to his calloused fist as it came upward to catch Tuckey full on his fleshy jaw. The *Solano's* owner went over backward, caught at a wooden stanchion, missed, and fell sprawling to the deck.

Jed's teeth flashed white in this sudden and pleasant realization of months-long anticipation.

"Don't!" he warned, as Tuckey struggled toward his knees. "Don't. Or I'll spill your teeth all over that fancy vest." He watched the hate blaze stark in the other's eyes, but Tuckey fell back on one elbow.

Jed retrieved his fallen cheroot, licked a torn leaf back into place, turned and made his way toward his cabin.



A HALF hour later, carpet bag in hand, the pursuer's gold coins, wages due, in his pocket, Jed plodded through the ankle deep dust of Sacramento City towards the confines of Sutter's Fort. He hauled his slim length up a four-foot curbing, turned left down a narrow calle and finally came to a halt before a 'dobe structure bearing a sign in sun-faded lettering that proclaimed the unimposing establishment within to be Sudden and Tempal's Emporium, Miners' Supplies and Farming Equipment. Below, in smaller lettering, the sign read: *J. Sudden, Pilot, Sacramento River.*

Jed's wide mouth curved momentarily in a bitter smile, then with a careless lifting of his shoulders, he stepped into the dimmed interior of the store.

John Tempal looked up, startled, from an open ledger lying on a back counter. He removed steel-rimmed spectacles from his pale eyes. "You're in early, Jed," he said. "Fast run upriver?"

Jed lowered his tall frame to a rough bench lining the side wall. "Fast—and last, John," he said tiredly. "Tuckey fired me." He lighted a knurled cigarro and related the events of the past hour to his junior partner.

"Piloting is through," he finished. "We might as well face it, John."

Tempal nibbled pensively at his wooden

penholder. "Hydraulic outfits?" he asked shortly.

Jed nodded. "Partly that," he agreed. "They're washing a thousand tons of dirt downriver every day. The deep draft boats are tied up already."

He got up from the bench, taking long, deliberate steps across the room. When he spoke again his voice was level, serious. "But it's mostly Weldon Tuckey. Tuckey and his fast, flat-bottomed sidewheelers. He's got passenger fares from San Francisco down to half a dollar. Freight rates are as bad. In two months there won't be an independent operator left on the river."

He stopped pacing, contemplated his cigar and flung it abruptly out the open doorway. "He's got no need now for fast runs and fancy-priced skippers," Jed went on. "He'll set his own rates—and wages. Nobody'll be able to buy beans on what Tuckey pays."

He went over to the doorway and watched the sodden cheroot smoldering in the dust of the street. When he turned back into the room there was an awkwardness to his smile. "Looks like you got a helper in Sudden and Templar's Emporium. Reckon I can peddle flour?"

There was no answering smile from Templar. He settled the polished spectacles on his nose and gestured toward the open ledger on the counter. "You might as well know it now, Jed," he said solemnly. "We're not making rent. The only things that move are shovels and flour. And they won't be selling in another ninety days. Those hydraulic diggings up the Yuba are showing more color in an hour than a man can sluice out in a month. Hell, man, the small miner is being run off the river. There's not one in ten washing out wages."

He chewed thoughtfully at his pen, then arched a thumb toward half a hundred plowshares stacked along the rear wall. "As for farm equipment . . ." He spread his hands significantly. "Looks like Congress'll be another ten years making up their minds on Sutter's Grant. Nobody's going to take a chance on the land 'til then. Those—" He motioned eloquently again at the plows. "Those'll be rust before we get our investment out of 'em. They'll have us to the wall in ten months, let alone ten years!"

In the dust-deadened quiet of the room, Jed's cadenced pacing was the only sound.

"John," Jed said soberly after awhile, "they'll tell you California is the land of gold and opportunity, but it looks as if we might get all-fired sick of bacon and beans before this—"

A shadow fell across the bright sunshine of the doorway interrupting his pessimistic culinary forecast. He turned to see the shadow evolve into the stubby figure of a man sweating

under the valley sun in a black frock coat, tight collar and beaver hat.

The hat jerked upward at the faded sign overhanging the doorway. "I'm in search of this man Sudden," the stranger explained brusquely.

Jed bowed half-ironically from the waist. "You've found him, sir."

The little man removed his hat and wiped sweat from a bald head. "I'm new owner of the steamer *Chin du Wan*," he introduced himself. "Name's Josiah McAleese. I'm in need of a pilot. A good one. You've been recommended."

"You flatter me, Mr. McAleese. Sit down, sir."



McALEESE sat and mopped dampness from the sweatband of his beaver. "I'll be frank and to the point, Captain. I understand you were pilot for Weldon Tuckey.

Can you beat the *Solano* on the downriver run?"

Jed wiped a calloused fist across day-old stubble on his jaw. "With the *Chin du Wan*?" he asked caustically.

McAleese ignored the slur, nodded, then qualified the gesture. "I have options on five other vessels," he said. "You can have your pick. They're all of shoal draft." He looked at Sudden sharply, then extracted a folded government notice from his waistcoat pocket and smoothed it out on the counter with a pudgy palm.

Jed read it through carefully, his gray eyes thoughtful. "Trial run downriver . . ." His lips moved half-aloud. "... State mail and express franchise to be awarded to boat making the fastest passage. In event . . ."

McAleese interrupted, his buttony eyes gleaming. "Tuckey's the only bidder," he said. "The rest are afraid of him. I'm not. I aim to beat him on that downriver run."

Jed eyed the other coolly. "With the *Chin du Wan*?" he asked again. The corners of his mouth curled in a pitying smile.

"With the *Chin du Wan*," McAleese said defiantly, "and you as pilot, Captain Sudden."

Jed lighted a twisted cheroot and watched the smoke spiral upward toward the cobwebbed darkness of the ceiling. "I respect your courage, sir, and your pocketbook," Jed said, "but not your judgment. The *Solano* is the fastest sidewheeler on the Sacramento."

McAleese coughed at the pungent smoke from the cigar. "I've been given to understand you know the river, Captain," he said challengingly.

Jed nodded agreement. "I know the river," he said, "better than most. But it isn't the river. It's what's under it that beaches steamboats." The old bitterness shaded his next words. "A year ago," he went on, "I'd have

jumped at the chance. Now, with the tailings from the hydraulic mines shoaling the channels every day, there're no shortcuts anymore. It's power that makes the fast runs, not piloting. Take Steamboat Slough for example. That used to save four miles. Today there's a bar of slickens at Peck's Landing that'd ground a ship's gig at low water."

He paused to draw thoughtfully at the cheroot, then laughed, a brittle, humorless sound. "In a few years there'll be no traffic on the Sacramento. There won't be water enough to float it. No, Mister, I'm getting out. I'd advise you to drop your options and do the same—while there's time."

McAleese's grunt of annoyance was plainly audible in the hot silence of the room. He stood up angrily. "I thought you were a river man, Sudden," he said coldly. "I see I was mistaken. Good day, sir!" He stalked toward the door.

From his place at the far counter, John Templar's short-sighted eyes watched his partner speculatively as the sting of the packet owner's rebuke sank home. Jed sat still, legs sprawled wide, his narrowed eyes focused in a fixed stare at the rusting farm equipment at the rear of the store.

Templar was about to speak when Jed's eyes raised slowly to meet his own, and now the bitterness was gone and even the hot resentment of a moment past at McAleese's curt insult. There was a faint mysterious sparkle behind them now. Jed strode to the door.

McAleese was already a dozen yards down the street.

"Hold on, Mister!" Jed called "You've hired yourself a pilot!"

Inside the dim interior again Josiah McAleese dabbed at the long sideburns accenting his bald head. "Now the—ah—terms, Captain," he began. "I—"

Jed's calculating look stopped his further words in mid-sentence. "What," Jed asked bluntly, "did you pay for the *Chin du Wan*?"

McAleese's head snapped back, startled, then he grinned. "Well," he answered, "it's no secret, Captain. The *Chin* is no fancy passenger packet. She's built for hauling freight. Two hundred thousand dollars."

Jed nodded slowly, considering, then turned sharply to his partner. "How much money do we have, John?"

Templar ran his tongue across parched lips. "Wh-why, fifty thousand maybe, tied up in this." He waved an all-inclusive hand across the room. "But—"

"Cash," Jed demanded. "How much?"

"Maybe a thousand, Jed, but—"

Jed fished through his pockets, counting carefully. Ten twenty-dollar gold pieces, Tuckey's gold, paid him in wages due, fell ringing on the counter.

"Twelve hundred dollars, Mister," Jed said. "We'll take a quarter interest in the *Chin du Wan*. The balance payable in ninety days—after we get that franchise. If I don't beat the *Solano* you keep the cash and the full interest in the *Chin*. Can you lose on that?"

McAleese's eyes shifted from Jed to John Templar's wide-eyed countenance and back again. "No," he answered finally, "I can't. Can you, Captain—to the *Solano*?"

Jed's cheek muscles made little knots under his tan. "Can't afford to now," he said grimly.

Ten minutes later the three men stood up. "That's settled then," McAleese said. He folded Sudden and Templar's note and placed it in his pocket. "The run is scheduled for Friday, gentlemen." He spoke to Jed. "That'll give you time for a shakedown as far as Collinsville, Captain, to see what the *Chin* will do."

Jed nodded, hesitated, then said, "One more thing."

He indicated the pile of farm equipment at the rear of the store. "I'd like to freight some of that down to San Francisco. Half a dozen plowshares, say. Might find a market for them there before they're a total loss." He smiled wryly. "Sudden and Templar could use some ready cash. I'll have them loaded on the *Chin* if I may."

"They'll be just that much added ballast," McAleese protested. "Take them down some other trip. Lord, man, I'll ship 'em for you free of charge on one of my other boats!"

Jed's sun-bleached brows drew together stubbornly. "The *Chin du Wan* can use a little ballasting from what I've seen of her," he said.

McAleese stroked his sideburns under his beaver hat. "You're the pilot, Mr. Sudden," he shrugged. "Do as you like, sir."



THE news of the impending clash of the rival packets ran through Sacramento City like fine gravel through a sluice box. By the time Friday's sun had cleared the Sierras to the eastward of the valley, the levees along the Embarcadero were crowded with expectant onlookers waiting for the start of the downriver run.

The *Chin du Wan*, paddles barely turning, was tugging at her singled up moorings when Jed came aboard. He noticed with satisfaction the faint wisps of smoke trailing out of the twin stacks that told him the engineer below decks had his boilers firing efficiently.

He mounted the ladder to the pilothouse slowly and deliberately, trying to keep his knees from fluttering and telling himself savagely that he was as bad as an apprentice on his first river passage. In the wheelhouse he lowered a forward window, leaned on the sash and studiously lighted a cheroot, hoping the quartermaster at the wheel wouldn't notice the

trembling in his fingers. The helmsman, however, seemed to notice only the rankness of the tarry tobacco and moved pointedly to a windward corner of the pilothouse.

Upstream a hundred yards Jed saw the *Solano's* crew shortening her shore lines. The sight made him straighten impatiently and he swung around and peered anxiously out the inshore window searching for McAleese and the wharfinger with the official clearance papers. He cursed softly to himself, giving attention again to the rival boat's preparations, when a stir in the crowd along the levee drew his questing eyes shoreward.

The high beaver hat of the *Chin du Wan's* owner showed among the throng, followed by the wharfinger and a tall, angular stranger in a clawhammer coat and flat-crowned sombrero. A lane opened in the crowd and the three men trooped over the narrow gangplank. "Governor Booker," McAleese introduced the tall, coldly taciturn stranger to Jed. "I've prevailed upon him to make the trip to San Francisco." He shaded a surreptitious wink in Jed's direction.

"Mr. McAleese has promised me a fast run, Captain Sudden," the governor said, offering his hand.

"Fast as the water will allow, sir," Jed said, warming to his favorite theme. "It's shoaling bad off the sloughs lately. These hydraulic—"

The governor raised a tempering hand. "I'm aware of the situation, sir." He smiled as if he allowed himself three or four a day. "If it interests you, Captain, I am sponsoring legislation to curb the mines upriver. Should it please the Lord and the voters of this great land we will have them regulated before too long." He turned abruptly to McAleese. "What's the delay, sir?"

The roar of gunpowder thundered and rolled across the river as the starting cannon in Sutter's Fort let go. At the same instant a reverberating shout from the crowd and a great billow of smoke rising above the *Solano* marked the rival sidewheeler's departure. Jed hurried, almost shoved, the wharfinger ashore, at the same time signaling the crew at the mooring lines to cast off.

The *Solano* was clear of her berth, both paddles creaming the yellow water to froth before Jed had backed the *Chin du Wan*, stopped the larboard paddle and straightened out for the channel with his starboard wheel. The *Solano* blew once, arrogantly, for the right of way, and passed to starboard in a frenzy of churning water. Weldon Tuckey's florid face leered triumphantly from an inshore window. A deck hand offered a hawser end derisively as the bigger boat swept grandly by.

Jed rang down a hurried bell and jingle to the engine-room and lined up the jackstaff dead on the *Solano's* fleeing stern. The *Chin*

gathered shuddering way, belched wood smoke and settled finally to the task of putting water under her counter.

"Not a good start, Captain," the governor commented from his place on the pilothouse settee.

"It's the finishing that counts," Jed said, and eyed the rival packet. "She's holding too much to the middle," he said, half to himself, "there'll still be a little tide. Starboard a hair, Hy, and keep her there."

The quartermaster toiled the big wheel a spoke or two and steadied down. The *Chin*, gathering headway fast, sent soaring rosettes of smudge toward the sky, shadowing the wheelhouse for a moment under a darkening cloud.

Jed spoke to McAleese without taking his eyes from the *Solano*. "Whistle down to the engineer, if you will, sir. Tell him to watch those China-boy firemen. I want steam, not cinders, on this passage. Larboard a bit, Hy, we'll dust that snag off Thompson's Point."

"You're acquainted with the river, Captain Sudden," the governor said, and the phrase was a flat statement, but flavored with a faint note of admiration.

"I was a hand on General Sutter's launch, sir, in '47. I know the Sacramento and I love it. It's a powerful shame that it'll soon be wading grounds for shore birds."

The governor glanced sidelong at Sudden, but a polite grunt was his only reply.



THE thrashing paddles of the *Solano* disappeared around a bend, her twin stacks showing golden in the sunlight above the leaning willows lining the shore. When the

Chin reached the crossing only short minutes later the other boat was a quarter mile ahead, footing fast for the next reach.

Jed fumbled for a cheroot, fingering it nervously as he watched. "We're a knot slower if not more," he said, thinking aloud. "That's a bit more than I like." He paced the narrow wheelhouse deck, calculating.

"We'll do well to hold our own through Suisun Bay," he went on thoughtfully, "and she's sure to overhaul us in San Pablo. We'd have a chance there, perhaps, with any kind of a lead, but . . ." His voice trailed off, thinking.

After awhile he stooped behind the window coaming to re-light his forgotten cigarro and when he came erect a moment later his jaw was clamped hard on the cheroot, definite decision in his eyes. He addressed McAleese. "We've got to beat her in the river," he said flatly, "or not at all."

He pulled a ponderous watch from his waistcoat pocket. "We'll be off Peck's Landing in nineteen minutes," he said. "That's the upper

entrance to Steamboat Slough. We could use the four miles the slough will save."

There was sudden silence in the wheelhouse. Down below decks a boiler door clanged shut. Behind them the great rhythmic pounding of the Chin's walking beam became noticeable for the first time. Hy, the quartermaster, opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it and shot a stream of tobacco juice toward the big brass cuspidor.

Josiah McAleese cleared his throat, spoke, coughed again and said, "The mouth of Steamboat is shoaled up, Captain, I'll remind you. There's been no boat through there for eighteen months. Hell'n perdition, man, a boy can wade from bank to bank!"

"You want a record, Mr. McAleese?" Jed asked icily.

The owner of the Chin du Wan ran a damp finger inside his damper collar. "A record, Mr. Sudden, not a wreck."

"Larboard easy, Hy, then steady on that broken willow," Jed said. "I was hired to beat the Solano, Mr. McAleese. I reckon that's what I'll do."

"No boat of mine is going through Steamboat, Mr. Sudden. That's final!"

"Captain Sudden, sir, if you please," Jed said with the thin edge of his voice. "And I'll thank you to remember that I'm part owner of this packet. We'll take the slough at Peck's Landing."

He spoke then to the helmsman, the sun wrinkles white at the corners of his eyes. "That'll be the landing shaping up ahead, Hy. We'll favor the north shore from here on."

"Why—why—" McAleese began, and stopped. He dabbed at the sweat trickling down his sideburns and glanced appealingly at the governor for help.

Governor Booker started a smile, caught himself in time, and mouthed a fresh cigar. "Glorious, this river country," he said conversationally. "Might as well enjoy it, McAleese."

Ahead of them now, downriver and out of sight beyond the bend at the tiny settlement of Courtland, the Solano blew a ringing blast on her whistle, a taunting challenge sent back to the futile efforts of the slower boat. But to Jed the sound was more than a challenge. It was an aching reminder of future days when the echo would be that of a locomotive pounding a steel-tracked roadway along the levee. A day when steamboats would be rotting on the mudflats of Tuleberg and Antioch for want of water to bear them. Already, he knew, the Central Pacific . . .

"Peck's Landing on the bow, sir," the quartermaster said.

Jed blew smoke to the wheelhouse draft. His voice was as cold as the mid-winter reaches of the lower river. "Steady as she goes, Hy. We'll cut the sandspit close."

He moved over to the starboard window, judging carefully the speed of the riverbank flying past, the current on the roots inshore, the white sand of the looming spit.

Hy licked dry lips, wiped a moist palm on his trousers seat.

Finally, with the narrow, high-banked entrance six points on the bow, Jed spoke and his voice was definite command. "Put her down, Hy," he said. "Hard-a-starboard!"

He rang the inshore paddle down to slow, watching the larboard wheel urge the Chin into a tight turn to the right. The packet came around like a ponderous ballerina, but slipping sideways relentlessly with the force of her momentum. Jed hooked thumbs into his raw-hide belt, spread his feet wide, straining to check the leeway with the weight of his leaning body.

The slough entrance bore ahead now, the sandspit on their starboard hand seeming to reach for the slowed paddle. Jed jerked at the engine pull and the demanding jingle forced the idling paddle to frenzied forward motion. He glanced quickly at the west bank where willow branches brushed the high sides of the Chin. From the corner of his eye he saw McAleese blotting dampness from chalk-like cheeks.



It was then the larboard paddle struck, slowed and nearly stopped, grinding sand. The Chin slewed wildly to the left, headed for the bank. Hy heaved frantically at the kicking wheel. Jed leaped to lend his weight to the rudder. The paddle broke free, bit savagely again at clear water and spewed foam at the clouded shoals of the sandbar astern.

Jed passed a suddenly trembling fist across his jaw and remembered to breathe. He spit out the severed and forgotten end of his cheroot before he spoke again.

"You'll have water from here on down, Hy," he said then. "Hold her to the outside of the bends and keep her out of the bushes."

Governor Booker suffered himself a thin smile. "That was piloting, Captain Sudden," he said. "Although I believe we have a willow tree or two festooning the Texas deck!"

McAleese said nothing, but his adam's apple, working spasmodically for minutes past, slowed to normal rhythm against his constricting collar.

The Solano was nowhere in sight when the Chin du Wan cleared Grand Island fifty-five minutes later and re-entered the Sacramento. A thin smudge that wasn't river mist showed above the Isleton bend three miles upriver.

Jed put down the long glass. "The Solano," he announced. "She'll be legging it, but we'll be bucking a flood for three, four hours. That'll help, figuring our lesser draft." He consulted

a notebook in his pocket, reckoning distance and tide. "She'll catch us about Benicia, or maybe in Carquinez Straits," he prophesied.

Jed hugged the shoreline down past Sacramento Point and the juncture of the San Joaquin, avoiding the adverse tide in mid-stream and holding the *Solano* well astern. But with Middle Ground Island abeam and seagulls wading the Suisun shoals on either hand there was nothing to do but hold the channel and watch the rival packet close the distance inexorably.

It was in the Carquinez narrows, true to Jed's prediction, the *Solano* caught them. The two boats raced paddle to paddle, yards apart, down the hill-bounded channel. High on the hurricane deck of the *Solano*, Weldon Tuckey stepped out of the pilothouse, removed his hat in a sweeping gesture and made an overly-elaborate bow. Slowly, inch by hard-fought inch, the yellow-stacked sidewheeler forged ahead.

"Appears like we'll eat smoke from here to Market Street," McAleese said glumly.

Jed grunted and picked up the engine-room speaking tube. "Get those heathen Chinese to chunkin' wood," he growled to the engineer. "I want another five pounds of steam or I'll log the lot of you a full day's pay."

He smiled grimly at the protestations coming up the speaking tube in answer to his order, but the *Chin*, he noticed, was soon trembling harder under increased pressure.

Jed watched the *Solano* with a critical eye for several minutes as the faster boat bore away to starboard and headed down the bay toward the distant Marin shore showing brown and purple in the afternoon haze.

"She's holding wide," he announced in satisfaction. "We'll cut Pinole Point short and gain a mile. There'll be water for us over the flats for another hour anyhow. That'll put us to The Brothers first and there's only room for one between them and the Contra Costa shore. That'll be another half-mile advantage. There's no reason I can name, gentlemen, why we shouldn't have the first line on the Market Street wharf."

McAleese's worried visage relaxed under Jed's confident assurance. He tugged at his cravat and turned to Governor Booker relaxing on the settee. "As I told you, Governor—"

What he was to impart to the state executive was lost in a sudden, hull-shaking blast from below decks. His words were drowned in the sibilant hiss of escaping steam. The great walking beam abaft the wheelhouse slowed perceptibly as the *Chin du Wan* lost way. Jed leaped for the engine-room speaking tube, but for a long while there was only the excited jabbering of a dozen Chinese audible to his impatient ears, with an occasional hot-tempered

shout from the engineer rising above the clamor. Long minutes later Jed got an answer to his persistent whistling and when he once again racked the mouthpiece on the bulkhead his face was a pale mask of hardness trying to hide the defeat in his eyes.

"One boiler's gone," he explained tonelessly to the others. "A Chinese fireman let his water get low. We'll proceed on one boiler—half speed."



UP ahead he watched the *Solano* turn sharply in toward The Brothers passage. In his numbed mind he could see again Weldon Tuckey's ironical bow, his greedy, triumphant smile. In his mind, too, was the vision of this, his last voyage on the river he loved, and of the grim, somber days ahead, trying to salvage the work and savings of twelve years by peddling farm equipment that no one would buy, and . . .

Governor Booker arose from the settee, cleared his throat and spoke, interrupting Jed's dark misgivings.

"It looks, gentlemen," he said coolly, "like the better boat has won."

McAleese, stunned by the fast-changing tide of affairs, pulled at his collar. "The faster boat, perhaps," he said hotly, "but no better than the *Chin du Wan*. Except for an irresponsible Chinese—"

Booker held up a restraining hand. "Please, Mr. McAleese," he said promptly. "I trust you can understand that in all fairness the state franchise will necessarily have to be awarded to the *Solano*. It leaves me no alternative in the matter. However . . ."

He paused, taking slow, stately steps across the wheelhouse, looking as if he were about to address the assembled legislature, then went on in seeming irrelevance, speaking to Jed. "It has been a distinct pleasure watching you work, Captain Sudden. Your river knowledge—ah—"

The governor cleared his throat and raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Would you mind telling me, sir, just how you found a channel at Peck's Landing, where McAleese tells me no boat has navigated for considerably more than a year?"

Jed rubbed a knuckled fist along his jaw. "That?" he said. "I didn't find one, sir. I made one." A slow smile eased the hard lines of disappointment from around his eyes. "If you'd care to have a look?"

The governor nodded interested assent to the suggestion.

Jed passed the course to Hy at the wheel, then beckoned the governor and McAleese to follow. He led the way toward the stern of the vessel.

At the boat deck taffrail Jed pointed down-

ward mutely to a jury-rigged contraption on the lower deck. There, lined up and spaced evenly along a heavy, squared timber, were six plowshares lashed securely in an upright position.

"On my shakedown run downstream a few days ago," Jed explained, "I ran the bar at Peck's Landing during the hour or so of high water. I towed this—this, gangplow you might call it, over the stern. The—well, the current did the rest. Washed the slickens away as fast as I plowed the bottom. Dredging, you might say it was, sir."

Booker was silent for a long time, his fingers drumming softly on the railing and his cold eyes appraising Jed occasionally with a critical gaze.

"Knowing what I do of the ways of politics and the intricacies of government," he said finally, allowing himself the third smile of the day, "I judge it will be some time, maybe a matter of years, before the hydraulic mines are brought under state control. Meanwhile, ah—as you gentlemen have pointed out, the Sacramento is quickly becoming unnavigable. It . . ."

The governor paused, searching his person for a cigar.

Jed proffered a black, nobby cheroot. The governor grimaced wryly, accepted it and went on, "It is to the state's advantage to keep the river open, both in the interests of supply for the inland settlements, and the government's fundamental concepts of free competition: for all concerned.

"Now, if the state were able, say, to contract for shallow-draft river craft, sufficient dredging equipment, and a man who had adequate knowledge of the river . . ." He lapsed into pensive silence, leaving the sentence unfinished, puffing not too happily at the cheroot Jed had bestowed upon him.



JEDEDIAH SUDDEN, pilot and purveyor of unsalable farm equipment, and Josiah McAleese, option holder on half a dozen shallow-draft sidewheelers, regarded each other dazedly through the thickening cloud of malodorous smoke arising from the governor's cigar. The smoke was not too obscuring, however, for Jed to perceive from the expression on McAleese's face that he, Jedediah Sudden, was as of this moment part owner of the soon to be commissioned state dredger, *Chin du Wan*.

"One other thing, gentlemen," the governor broke the silence, scowling at the cigar. "It would seem to me that the recipient of the state's mail and express contract—in this case, Weldon Tuckey—should in all fairness to the commonwealth, be made subject to high enough taxes to offset the state's expense in keeping the river channels dredged clear. Taxes adequate enough also to equalize passenger and freight rates to the point where any and all may have access to the river as a public—"

A faint echo of sound from down the bay interrupted the furtherance of the governor's embryo plans. The three men turned as one to see a white feather of steam rising from the *Solano's* whistle as she neared the Market Street wharf.

Jed's lips still smiled, but his eyes clouded momentarily in brief disappointment. "I'd liked to've beaten that packet," he murmured thoughtfully, then sudden remembrance of the cause of defeat brought him to decisive action.

He was striding determinedly toward the engine-room ladder when McAleese called after him, "Something wrong, Captain?"

Jedediah Sudden, pilot, master, and part owner of the state dredger, *Chin du Wan*, didn't even pause in his willful stride. He grinned back over his shoulder. "Just going to hang a Chinaman!" he said.



(Continued from page 10)

FRED LANE, who joins our Writers' Brigade for the first time this month with "North of Forty" on page 104, confesses—

Without being at all aware of it, I started my writing career when I was 18. I was working out with a chipping hammer on the sizzling boat deck of a freighter in the Sulu Seas bound for Zamboanga when I happened to glance into the radio shack. Sparks had his feet on the desk, the fan going, and was reading a magazine. Pausing to observe this enviable character brought on the bosun's wrath, a few additions to my vocabulary, and the ambition to become a "brass pounder." Study when off watch on the long runs to the Orient, and the help of a radio operator or two, enabled me to get my ticket. Then I set about my business of seeing the world—the old *Oceanic* to Australia and the South Seas, U. S. Lines out of New York to Europe. Liking variety and being curious, I served on oil-barges, lumber schooners, tugboats, freighters, and luxury liners.

I went into shoreside high-speed telegraphy, then found myself in broadcast engineering. With no visible signs of reluctance, I discarded my screwdrivers and pliers and started working with words as a writer-producer for radio. Encouraged by an old hand in the fiction game—Dick Wetjen—(Turn to page 118. Ed.)—I forsook the soapmakers and cereal boys of the airwaves.

During the war, I went back to radio in a teaching capacity, training radio men for the Signal Corps and merchant marine at Central Trade School in Oakland, California; and to OWI as a writer of overseas propaganda.

Now living on 14 shoreside acres at Moss Beach, California, watching the ships go by between yarns. But, if I get a gleam in my eye when I see a tramp hull down on the horizon, there's always my lovely wife to inquire as to how I can write by looking out the window. But I can dream, can't I?

AND Harold O. Weight, whose "Winter Drift" you'll find on page 110, writes, on his first appearance in *Adventure*—

• I'm 35 years old, a native Californian, unmarried. I've been writing, or trying to write, since I was a kid. Used to review and preview pictures and stage shows and write a weekly column for one of the first—and now long dead—Hollywood trade magazines. Had some plays staged by little theatre groups, stories in local magazines. Was local publicity man in one of California's warmer political campaigns.

Somewhere along the line I discovered that if you worked in the back shop, checks came along every week and you could exchange them for things to wear and eat.

From then until the war, I worked a good part of the time as linotype operator, floor man and press man, and collected a fine assortment of rejection slips on the side.

Since I had picked up a smattering of information about almost everything but radio, when the war came, the Army made a radar man out of me. Spent some three years at the Air Forces school at Boca Raton, Florida as air and ground instructor in the operation, theory and maintenance of air-borne radar equipment—sea-search, navigation and high altitude bombing through overcast. Also operated some super-sonic training equipment that would have made Rube Goldberg envious. Top rating in the Army, staff sergeant.

Nothing especially exciting happened there, although I accumulated a few grey hairs sweating out the take-offs of overloaded B-34's. Then, every now and then a bored pilot would take to chasing the half-wild cattle in the Everglades for amusement. The rear view of a frightened cow-critter from the greenhouse of a bomber is an astonishing sight. (So help me, we came back once with spots of mud on the plexiglass.)

V-J day found me in British Columbia on the way to Adak in the Aleutians as a radar operator, and I returned to the States as over age.

Before the war, the West and Southwest—and particularly the desert regions—had been my hobby. Rather, perhaps, I should say, my accumulated hobbies—photography, rock collecting, cutting and polishing, mining and western history—seemed to fit together under that heading. Since the war, I have spent most of my time in some of the more isolated sections of the West, and if I can keep the financial ends meeting, the desert is going to be my vocation.

I'm afraid there isn't much to tell about "Winter Drift." It's been a long time cooking. I had the background collected and the story roughed out before the war. When I came back, it was one of the two story ideas which still seemed worth going on with. It struck me, while I was digging around in cattle history, that there had been an awful lot written about stampedes, and very little about winter drifts. Yet some of the old timers, who should know, feared winter drifts a great deal more of the two. And it has long been my contention that in getting the wonders of this modern civilization, we have needlessly sacrificed a hell of a lot of codes, beliefs and human qualities that we aren't going to be able to get along without. I tried to point out a little of that.

It might or might not be of interest that the part of the story including the blizzard was written while I was camped out in one of the most fascinating bits of California desert—the area between the Chocolate and Chuckwalla mountains and the Colorado River. The sweat was running off my hide, and all that snow sounded like a good idea.

WILLIAM DU BOIS, whose new Captain Carter yarn starts the ball rolling on page 12, comes up with the following footnote—

In connection with my story, "Balloons for Bowlegs," may I anticipate the military experts among you readers—who are certainly aware that observation balloons were not an official part of our Army equipment until General McClellan created his first balloon corps in 1861?

The records show that Joel Poinsett (the Secretary of War at the time of the Seminole troubles) was approached on the subject by one Colonel Sherburne who, in 1840, suggested that aerialists be assigned to the forces in Florida to make night ascensions, chart the precise location of Indian camps by their fires, and thus prepare for a surprise attack. Sherburne was confident that his plan would be approved—so confident, in fact, that he arranged with Charles Durant, a prominent aeronaut of the time, to supply the Department with two balloons, at a total cost of \$1500.

Ben Butler, a former War Secretary, was said to have approved the plan; so did a former commander in Florida, General Gaines. Elsewhere, however, the brass was much less enthusiastic—and the balloons were never purchased.

Pondering this unique recommendation, I couldn't help wondering what would have happened had those two balloons actually been shipped to Florida, to a field commander as enterprising as Colonel Sherburne. Obviously, the sort of balloon then in use would not have been practical in a mobile Indian war. Still, I'm of the opinion that Sergeant Grady and his General would have tried it at least once—with a grudging assist from Captain Carter.

It's also interesting to note that, during the Mexican War, another aerialist proposed that the fortress at Vera Cruz be attacked and reduced from the air. Again, the project was still in the discussion stage, with the vetos predominating, when the Mexican redoubt was taken by traditional means.

E. C. SMITH of 32 Tilson Rd., Toronto, Ont., Canada, commenting on Nat McKelvey's article about the U. S. Camel Corps in our August issue, doubts the author's claim that Maj. Henry C. Wayne and Lieut. D. D. Porter, of the U. S. Army and Navy respectively, observed camels in action at the Battle of Balaklava or heard the "blood-curdling whoops" of their native drivers over the noise of battle as the beasts went into action. Mr. Smith writes—

... I have long considered myself an outstanding authority on the Crimean War. This is based on the fact that I have some

idea as to what caused the war, and how Britain was induced to "back the wrong horse" in it; that I know who won the Battle of Balaklava; and that I have some inkling as to the eventual outcome of the stupid and stuffy affair.

But this is the first hint I have read as to the use of camel troops by the British in the Crimea. And if they were used it is doubtful if Wayne or Porter, way up at G. H. Q., nearly four miles away, could have heard the whooping of 'their drivers.

Despite the oare with which riding camels have been bred through the centuries, and the relatively high price such beasts command, the camel has been and remains in the main a lowly beast of burden. Armies moving across certain parts of the world have needed huge droves of them to carry supplies.

There is historic reference, I think in Xenophon, to an army coming up out of Egypt in the days before Alexander, which possessed a million camels. That might have been an exaggeration. But in World War II, just one of several of the small British columns which invaded Ethiopia to drive out the Italians, was accompanied by 30,000 camels. These were considered quite expendable—and were in fact almost totally expended—provided the relatively small fighting force arrived properly supplied at its destination for combat.

Camel troops have never been successful cavalry, despite what Maj. Wayne or Lieut. Porter may have reported back to some Congressional Committee. They have been efficient police, or mounted infantry when intelligently used. It is interesting to note that the very people who have had the most to do with camels, have at the same time developed the outstanding cavalry horses of their times. This is equally true of Arabia and Africa, and also of the interior of Asia.

The camel is the beast of burden—the horse is the fighting mount.

Why? Because the camel is too damned dumb to be a cavalry mount, while the horse and the elephant are not.

The camel cannot be trained to face a shower of darts or arrows, to try to pierce a stand of pikes, or even to go forward if a few infantrymen wave swords in his face. Let alone charge Russian artillery at Balaklava!

The camel is so dumb no one really knows if he is tame or wild. He certainly is not domesticated, he's too dumb for that. But at the same time he is too dumb to run away most of the time, so he's too dumb to be wild too.

I don't say that there have never been any battles won because one side had camels and the other didn't. Horses, unused to their smell and noise, naturally take fright. But the horse can easily be

(Continued on page 141)



ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

THE Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.

Query: (a) Can you tell me the total number of Pueblo Indians in New Mexico, U. S. A? (b) The names of all tribes of Pueblo Indians? (c) The number of members of the Isleta tribe in New Mexico. (Navajo.) (d) The name of a manufacturer of authentic jewelry of Navajo Indians?

—R. L. Gilroy,
1320 Fletcher Ave.,
Prospect Park,
Delaware Co., Penna.

Reply by H. F. Robinson: (a) and (b) are answered in the table below, as well as (c), although I do not quite understand why you add "Navajo" as though you thought that the Navajo Indians were a part of the Isleta Indians.

The so called Pueblo Indians are those who live in villages, well built, and are in the main irrigation farmers. You will see that there are 18 groups, and several of these have a number of villages. They are divided into four linguistic groups, so there are in reality but four tribes.

The Zuni Indians are also village dwellers and form another linguistic group.

The Navajos are the largest of the tribes, and live in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and a few in Colorado. I haven't their late census, but they number almost 60,000. They do not live in villages, are nomadic and move around as the demands of their stock make necessary.

Your last question regarding "authentic" Navajo jewelry makers. The real Navajo silver jewelry is made by individual silversmiths scattered over the entire reservation, and they have no factory or anything of that kind. They sell what they make to Indian traders of which there are hundreds.

Here in Albuquerque there is one firm that makes such jewelry, and the workmen and workwomen are all Indians, but not all Navajo, there being many Pueblans who are good silversmiths. This is Maisel's

Indian Trading Post, 510 West Central Ave., Albuquerque.

If you wish to buy silver and let me know the details I may be able to put you in touch with traders and dealers.

THE PUEBLOS OF NEW MEXICO

| | | POPULATION | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Present Name | Old Spanish Name | | | | | | |
| Indian Name | | 1805 | 1900 | 1912 | 1915 | 1930 | 1942 |
| Acoma | | | | | | | |
| | San Estevan de Acoma | | | | | | |
| | Ace or Ahko | 731 | 492 | 857 | 915 | 1036 | 1822 |
| Cochiti | | | | | | | |
| | San Buena Ventura de Cochiti | | | | | | |
| | Kotyiti | 656 | 295 | 234 | 251 | 283 | 346 |
| Isleta | | | | | | | |
| | San Agustine del Isleta | | | | | | |
| | Shahwibak | 419 | 1050 | 1057 | 1117 | 1036 | 1304 |
| Jemez | | | | | | | |
| | San Diego de Jemez | | | | | | |
| | Heminish | 264 | 455 | 555 | 569 | 673 | 767 |
| Laguna | | | | | | | |
| | Laguna | | | | | | |
| | Kewaik | 940 | 1077 | 1616 | 1706 | 2146 | 2686 |
| Nambe | | | | | | | |
| | San Francisco de Nambe | | | | | | |
| | Na-im-be | 143 | 81 | 112 | 115 | 128 | 144 |
| Pojoaque | | | | | | | |
| | N. S. de Guadalupe de P. | | | | | | |
| | Posunwage | 100 | 12 | 16 | 15 | 7 | 25 |
| Picuris | | | | | | | |
| | San Lorenzo de Picuris | | | | | | |
| | Pinweltha | 250 | 98 | 126 | 118 | 112 | 115 |
| Santa Ana | | | | | | | |
| | Santa Ana | | | | | | |
| | Tamaya | 450 | 228 | 221 | 233 | 232 | 273 |
| Santa Clara | | | | | | | |
| | Santa Clara | | | | | | |
| | Khapo | 186 | 223 | 264 | 319 | 380 | 528 |
| Santo Domingo | | | | | | | |
| | Santo Domingo | | | | | | |
| | Kihwa | 333 | 772 | 872 | 775 | 860 | 1017 |
| Sandia | | | | | | | |
| | H. S. de los Dolores de S. | | | | | | |
| | Nanfiath | 314 | 86 | 76 | 81 | 112 | 139 |
| San Felipe | | | | | | | |
| | San Felipe | | | | | | |
| | Katistaya | 289 | 516 | 517 | 529 | 537 | 697 |
| San Ildefonso | | | | | | | |
| | San Ildefonso | | | | | | |
| | Po hwo ge | 175 | 137 | 115 | 111 | 106 | 147 |
| San Juan | | | | | | | |
| | San Juan de los Caballeros | | | | | | |
| | Oke | 194 | 465 | 376 | 428 | 510 | 702 |
| Taos | | | | | | | |
| | San Geronimo de Taos | | | | | | |
| | Toa-tha | 508 | 419 | 533 | 550 | 700 | 830 |
| Tesuque | | | | | | | |
| | San Diego de Tesuque | | | | | | |
| | Tathunge | 181 | 80 | 95 | 99 | 121 | 147 |
| Zia | | | | | | | |
| | N. S. de la Asuncion de Zia | 245 | 116 | 118 | 132 | 173 | 235 |

THE succulent amphibian.

Query:—We are planning a 3 year surveying trip through Panama and Honduras and Columbia.

We are interested to know of any edible amphibians in this territory and of the ones that are in the rivers and lakes that are dangerous.

—Frank N. Perrin
Pontiac, Mich.

Reply by Clifford H. Pope:—Frogs are the only amphibians that would be useful as food and any of these can be eaten if skinned. Toads are not ordinarily eaten. One recognizes a toad by its dry warty skin and large elongate gland on the shoulder. The big so-called marine toad (which is not an inhabitant of the ocean but terrestrial like other toads) reaches a great size and as far as I know, it, too, could be eaten; in general, the skin of all amphibians is poisonous, especially that of toads. No amphibian is dangerous in the ordinary sense of the word and even toads can be handled with impunity. A large marine toad, when greatly annoyed, will eject venom a short distance if one of the shoulder glands is pressed and this venom is excessively irritating to the eye.

BRITISH AFRICA—no likely spot for Yanks to settle down.

Query:—A friend and myself, both recently discharged from the Army, both were stationed in and around and saw service in Tanganyika and Kenya Colonies during the war. We have several hundred dollars between us and are interested in the possibility of finding work and settling in either territory. Can you give us any information or suggestions?

—E. M. D.
Lynn, Mass.

Reply by Gordon MacCreagh:—You are hoping, I am afraid, to bust into a very tough proposition.

You have, you say, a few hundred dollars apiece, the two of you, and you want to settle in Tanganyika or Kenya.

Even before the war, I am sorry to say, you would have to have a few thousand dollars apiece. Now, post War II, it is probably going to be much tougher.

You have seen some little service in that country. Surely you saw something of local conditions. You know that you can't compete with cheap native labour in unskilled trades. You know that the native can be trained to a whole lot of skilled jobs too—such as building trades, auto mechanics, radio, telegraphs, mining; and that they will work for ten hours a day and for as little money a month as you would need in a week.

So what remains? Executive positions. The same old executive jobs that the white

man has reserved for himself in all his colonies, whether he be British, French, or Dutch.

And how are you going to find executive jobs—or any kind of top-flight job that pays a white-man living scale—unless you have first stayed a while and proven your worth in a smaller job?

It's a closed proposition from the start.

Furthermore, the owners of those colonies aren't breaking their necks to beg for foreign immigration. They want to attract their own people. And the way their own people get there is to get hired by some outfit in the homeland; and, at that, people with some sort of special skills that are not readily found amongst the resident colonials.

Where there may be two men looking for a job and one is British and one a foreigner, whom would you bet on to get the job?

You have your few hundred dollars. Fine. You could go and you'd have a grand time go-look-see until your money gave out. But after that I can't encourage you in any hopes of landing a nice job with any sort of an American idea of wages. You would be competing with the Britisher and the half-caste and the East Indian and the local native; and that is a competition that you—that we Americans—cannot meet. We think on a different scale.

Lastly, I must remind you that in post-war Africa, just as much as in post-war everywhere else, all preferences, all priorities, all opportunities will be given to their own veterans, not to foreigners.

No sir, I can't encourage you. But, if you want official conviction, you can write to His Majesty's East African Dependencies Bureau, London, England. You will receive pamphlets detailing qualifications desirable and necessary for settlement in British Africa.

THE muffled rustle of silk from Pa.

Query:—Can you advise me as to the possibilities and advisability for sericulture in Pennsylvania?

—Marion E. Fox,
455 S. Atlantic Ave.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Reply by S. W. Frost:—The culture of silkworms has not been practical in Pennsylvania and it is very questionable if sericulture can be practiced successfully anywhere in the United States. It is especially impractical in the central and northern part of the country because only one generation can be produced during a season. It requires from six to eight weeks to rear a group of cocoons from eggs. Some of the cocoons are reserved to secure moths which in turn lay a new batch of eggs. These eggs must be placed in cold storage for several weeks and then transferred to a warm place before they will hatch. Gen-

erally they are permitted to remain dormant for the remainder of the summer and winter. This means a long period during which no silk can be produced and the workers are idle.

Recent glowing accounts in popular magazines indicate that silkworms can be successfully raised in certain southern states such as Texas and California. Because of the cost of labor and other problems, I doubt if sericulture is practical even there. Silk culture requires a great deal of hand labor in picking leaves, separating them from the berries, feeding the caterpillars two or three times a day and unreeling the silk from the cocoons. It is often intimated that machines have been developed to do all this work. I have reared silkworms for several consecutive years to learn something of the problems and still do not see the solution. It has been suggested that workers physically unfit for other jobs could be employed for silk production. Even these could not compete with the cheap labor of China or Japan. If Americans would be willing to work for 30 or 40 cents a day, silk might profitably be produced in the warmer parts of the United States.

Silkworms feed freely on mock orange and mulberry. Both grow freely in this country. However silkworms grown in America are more subject to diseases and therefore difficult to raise.

There are several rather recent articles on sericulture. A rather complete account of the industry occurs in a small book "Silk, Its Production and Manufacture" written by Luther Hooper and published by Pitman and Sons. This sells for \$1.00. Circular 363 of the Agricultural Experiment Station, Berkeley, California, "Silk Culture in California" by E. O. Essig, 1945 could probably be obtained upon request. The General Biological Supply House, Chicago, Ill., has a leaflet "Rearing the Silk-Worm Moth" and offers living and preserved material.

FLASH!

Query:—I have placed an order for the following photographic equipment: An Ansco Pioneer Camera with synchronized flash, fixed focus, Meniscus lens.

Objective: Indoor pictures of a small child (one year old).

Questions: (1) What effect do these bulbs have on the eyes, if one is looking directly at them?

(2) What is chance of bulb exploding?

(3) How far should camera be from subject, if there is possibility of above?

(4) Can effective pictures be secured in daylight with this equipment? That is, indoors with ordinary light from windows?

(5) Best type of flash bulb to use?

Some of this may sound rather silly, but I have had no experience with flash or indoor photography. Have used a Kodak 616, F4.5 lens for several years, but all my work has been outdoors. Will appreciate any information you can give me.

—Eldon B. Greenland,
Aberdeen, Md.

Reply by Paul L. Anderson:—Replying to your questions in order: (1) I do not believe that these flash bulbs will have any appreciable effect on the child's eyes. They may make him blink slightly if he happens to be looking directly at them, but I do not see why there should be any further effect.

(2) There is no chance of a bulb exploding. Once in a great, great while one breaks (this has never yet happened to me) but the bulbs are vacuum bulbs, like an incandescent lamp, and when one does break, it does so by collapsing inward, not by exploding. Therefore it may spill a few fragments of glass on the floor, but will not throw them about the room.

(3) Answered in (2).

(4) You will get much better pictures by using these bulbs in conjunction with daylight. When used with a synchronizer that is mounted on the camera, the light is almost in coincidence with the lens, and the result is a flat picture, lacking any feeling of relief or roundness, and often chalky. If you use some supplementary illumination, you can get relief, and a much better feeling of life and reality.

Also, you can to some extent get this feeling of relief by using a separate reflector (ignoring the synchronizer) and setting off your flash six or eight feet to one side of the camera. In this case, use an "open" flash; that is, set your shutter for "Time," open it, fire the flash, and close the shutter. The duration of the flash is on the order of 1/50 second, so it is actually faster than your shutter, and there is no chance of the subject moving during the exposure.

Still further, it is well to have the room well lighted, since in that case the pupils of the subject's eyes will be normal, and you will avoid the staring effect of pupils dilated as a result of weak general illumination.

In general, the best use of the flash for portraits comes when the subject is back-lighted by daylight, and the flash is used merely to illuminate and thereby relieve the dark side of the subject.

(5) Use No. 11 bulbs; these are the ones for which your outfit is designed, and although others can be used, these are the most desirable.

If you are using flash alone, without other illumination, you will do well to use either Superpan Press or Super XX film, since these are much faster than Verichrome.

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are still engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which were set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work was to be of secondary importance to their official duties. This was as it should be, and when you didn't receive answers to queries as promptly as we all wished, your patience was appreciated. Foreign mails are still slow and uncertain, many are still curtailed drastically, but now that the war is over we can hope for a more expanded, smoother functioning *Ask Adventure* service very soon. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure*.

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: Guides and equipment—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure*.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 166th, N. Y. C.

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Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities. Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDTCE, care of *Adventure*.

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, 8225 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 8, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: Regulations, mechanics, racing—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure*.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: Foreign and American—DORNEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey

Small Boating: Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burlin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure*.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MUEL E. THRUSS, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects—DR. S. W. FOSTER, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Forestry, Tropical: Tropical forests and products—WM. B. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: Reptiles and amphibians—CLIFFORD H. FOSTER, care of *Adventure*.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of Adventure.

Ornithology: *Birds, their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD McNICOL, care of Adventure.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling:—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of Adventure.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESNERGER, care of Adventure.

Taxidermy:—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping:—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11581 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army:—COL. R. G. EMBERT, U.S.A. Ret., care of Adventure.

Military Aviation:—O. B. MYERS, care of Adventure.

Federal Investigation Activities:—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of Adventure.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police:—*Its history, duties and traditions*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

The French Foreign Legion:—GEORGES SUDREZ, care of Adventure.

State Police:—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of Adventure.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands:—BUCK CONNER, Corner Field, Quartsale, Ariz.

New Guinea:—L. P. B. ABMIT, care of Adventure.

New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa:—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Welling, New Zealand.

Australia and Tasmania:—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

South Sea Islands:—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Sydney N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar:—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. 2 Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MCCREADIE, care of Adventure. 3 Tripoli, Sahara caravans—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of Adventure. 4 Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of Adventure. 5 Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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Central America:—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of Adventure.

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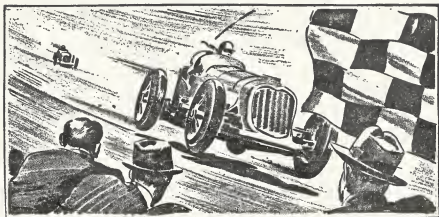
Alaska:—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 Pacific Coast States—FRANK WINCH, care of Adventure. 2 New Mexico; Indians, etc.—H. F. ROBINSON, 720 W. New York Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. 4 Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies—FRED W. EGLESTON, Elks Home, Elko, Nev. 5 Idaho and environs—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. 6 Arizona, Utah—C. C. ANDERSON, Holbrook Tribune-News, Holbrook, Arizona. 7 Texas, Oklahoma—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2303 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River—GEO. A. ZEEB, 51 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. 3 Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11581 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 Maine—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. 2 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 710, Woodmont, Conn. 3 Adirondacks, New York—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. 5 Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of Adventure. 6 The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia—PAUL M. FINE, Jonesboro, Tenn.

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(Continued from page 132)

trained to understand what the stink means and the grunting too.

Man has tried to domesticate this dumb beast of burden for nearly 25 centuries, and hasn't got to first base yet.

We passed Mr. Smith's letter along to Author McKelvey for answer and here's his reply—

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you for your interesting letter. . . However, there *was* a camel corps at Balaklava. My authority for stating that camels fought there is Prof. Lewis Burt Lesley, M.A., associate professor of history, San Diego State Teachers College.

He makes the following statement in his book, "Uncle Sam's Camels," published by the Harvard University Press, 1929, page 9:

"Into the very thick of the forces engaged in the Crimean War went these intrepid searchers (Wayne and Porter) for camels, and at Balaklava they learned that the Arabian camel was indispensable to the British military force."

The following is taken from a Report of the Secretary of War (Jefferson Davis) to the 34th Congress, 3rd Session:

"Upon arriving at the scene of operations the camels were made to kneel in a square—forming as it were a base of operations from which others operated as infantry. . . In case of extremity, the square offered a cover under which a thousand men could find comparative shelter. The animals were prevented from rising by a hobble on the foreleg."

The above is pertaining to what Major Wayne and Lt. Porter witnessed at Balaklava. Concerning the ability of our observers, Wayne and Porter, to hear the "blood curdling whoops" of the camel drivers, I grant that they would not have heard them had they remained at G.H.Q., four miles away. However, nowhere in the article did I state that they remained at G.H.Q. Knowing Americans, you will probably grant that Wayne and Porter probably got to within a mile or two of the actual fighting.

Judging by what Prof. Lesley says and by what Jeff Davis reported to Congress, camels did fight at Balaklava, if only as barricades for riflemen, somewhat in the fashion of the circular forts our pioneers used to make with a covered wagon train attacked by Indians.

If Prof. Lesley and Jeff Davis can be proven wrong, I am indebted to you for fresh information.

Cordially,
Nat McKelvey

And we still don't know how far a camel drover's whoop can be heard!—K. S. W.

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(Continued from page 121)

where feeling ran so strongly about this, mainly because some ancient mariner kept harping about it, that a delegation asked to have the odd man removed.

The Jonah legend is well known, and is not unconnected with the 13 superstition, but it can become serious and men considered Jonahs have been known to quit ships rather than face a beating-up or being tossed overside some dark night. A woman on board was often considered a sort of Jonah, and so was a black cat or a cross-eyed man. And the sight of St. Elmo's fire at the truck or yardarm (that curious greenish-yellow light that seems to run around like a ball or sometimes like a snake) was enough to make strong men tremble as an omen of ill luck.

Most of the legends and customs related in the foregoing I have been acquainted with myself, but my grandfather, who sailed in the 'fifties, told me of two others which make rather creepy additions. There was first The Swimmer, which Kipling mentions somewhere as "the thing that would not drown." This is again connected with the Jonah belief. If a Jonah were tossed overside and he happened to be innocent he just kept swimming after the ship and crying out piteously to be picked up. He would do this for hours or even days while the ship tried to run from him, and when she inevitably came to disaster the only hands drowned would be those who had disposed of the innocent man. The survivors would invariably swear they had heard The Swimmer crying out all the time.

Then there was the Midnight Leadsman. This useful specter was apt to appear at midnight (never seen, of course) and call out the water depths if a vessel was heading into shoal water. Just why he should do this for any particular ship was never made plain, but it was said if a captain followed the directions of the ghostly voice he would escape all danger, and run bang into it if he ignored the warnings.

It is probably as well that most of the gruesome beliefs and legends have already disappeared, and the rest are well on their way. But it seems a pity, even in this highly scientific age, that a few of the pleasanter fantasies should depart.

Which causes me to inquire once again: What has happened to Fiddlers' Green, and why are we all consigned to Davy Jones' Locker? I know that Fiddlers' Green is filled with girls and grog and grub, and everything is free, and shipowners are put to work. It is undoubtedly a very sinful place. But surely sailors haven't changed so much they prefer old Davy Jones and what he has to offer!

THE END

(Continued from page 109)

"Shall we man the cannon, sir, and get a line across?" Mr. Fanshaw asked.

"No," Captain Colby said. "It's too late for that." Then, he turned to Sparks, saying, "Tell them to clear everyone from the forward part of the ship. Everyone, understand. Tell her we're going to ram the starboard bow."

"Yes sir," Sparks ran aft.

"Mr. Fanshaw, see that all the collision and bulkhead doors forward are closed. Have men ready to man the pumps. Then, get everyone aft and stand by to ram."

Mr. Fanshaw hastened to do as he was told. But he was puzzled. By now, they should be shooting a line over or, at least, manning the boats that would pick up a few survivors.

"Stand by to ram," called the captain. The order was echoed as Captain Colby took the *False Bay's* wheel himself. The engine-room telegraph rang for full speed as he brought her around so that her bow was heading for the starboard bow of the *Avonmouth*.

"He's gone crazy," Mr. Fanshaw shouted suddenly to the bosun. "He'll sink us, too."

The *Avonmouth's* crew and passengers were huddled around the superstructure amidships as the *False Bay* bore down swiftly on the sinking liner. The *Avonmouth's* bow had lifted, but wasn't yet clear of the surface. The gap between the two ships was closing quickly. The mate grasped the rail to steady himself against the crash. A hundred feet—fifty feet.

The *False Bay* hit with a resounding crash of steel and timber, tearing deep into the *Avonmouth's* starboard bow. "Man the pumps. Stand by to bring survivors over the bow," came the order. The freighter's engines were still pushing her forward, holding her hard against the other vessel.

The passengers were coming aboard the *False Bay*, the seamen helping the women and children down from the higher bow of the *Avonmouth*. They worked fast, fighting against time.

When finally the *Avonmouth's* captain stepped down from his own ship to the *False Bay*, Captain Colby ordered, "Reverse engines." The freighter trembled as she tried to pull herself free. Her own bow was dipping, being dragged down by the sinking vessel. But finally, with a ripping crash, she tore away and backed into clear water. A few moments later, the *Avonmouth* began to sink, stern first.

With the aid of searchlights, they picked up the boats that had managed to get clear, and Captain Colby ordered his ship on a southerly course, half-speed ahead. "Keep a sharp lookout for ice signs, Mr. Fanshaw," he cautioned. "Calf ice, echo—" He named all the hazards and added, "It doesn't pay to take chances in the ice zone north of forty."

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The mate stared hard at the little skipper's back. Mr. Fanshaw knew the rule about collisions, all right. When you hit another ship, never back away. If you do, the other vessel's likely to sink. But, he had never heard of the rule being worked in reverse.



MR. FANSHAW was a day late for his wedding when the *False Bay* limped up the East River. But he was sure that he could explain everything to Rosie. When finally he got ashore, he took the subway and headed for Coney Island. Steering a zig-zag course through the milling throngs, he eventually arrived at the dart-game concession.

Rosie wasn't in sight. Instead a burly man with a yellow mustache appeared to be in command. He was bellowing, "Hit the bull's-eye and win a baby-doll. Three darts for a dime." He spotted Mr. Fanshaw and called, "Feel lucky, mister?"

"Not exactly," the mate replied. "Er—Rosie, has she got the day off?"

The big man laughed. "Rosie doesn't work here any more. She's a sudden gal, Rosie is, so it wasn't no surprise to me when she ups and marries that lifeguard. They went out to Hollywood to get in the movies."

Mr. Fanshaw stood aghast. He was stunned. Finally, he managed, "You—you are sure?"

"Sure? 'Course I'm sure. I'm Rosie's only brother, ain't I?" He raised his voice again. "Hit the bull's-eye and win a baby-doll—"

Mr. Fanshaw turned and wandered away slowly, trying to gather his thoughts. When he finally found his way back to the ship, he encountered Mr. Jackson who said, "You don't look too happy for a prospective bridegroom, mister."

Mr. Fanshaw did not answer. He was in no mood to explain. He brushed past the third mate. He wanted to be alone.

"Wait a minute, mister. Here's a letter for you." Mr. Fanshaw whirled and grabbed. Maybe Rosie— But it wasn't from Rosie. It was a bill. One hundred dollars due and payable for one engagement ring.

In his cabin, he sat down on his bunk. "Women!" He spat out the word like he'd bitten into a wormy apple. "Cold as ice an' twice as treacherous." Well, maybe Captain Colby would let him sign on again when the *False Bay* got her nose remodeled. Captain Colby—there was a skipper that knew the sea. And then, he remembered when the captain had stroked his beard and said, "All sailors are north of forty where women are concerned."

Mr. Fanshaw conceded to himself that Captain Colby knew women too.

THE END

(Continued from page 51)

use for the hold-up when you already had another pair slung to your belt? Does that make sense?"

Crocker admitted that it didn't by wagging his head.

"Every week or so," Gart continued, "you rode to Toiling Tree to collect your bounty. Left your pony in the alley, walked over to the courthouse. You're crazy about weapons. You shouldn't have toted those saddle-guns. Damned careless of you to leave them and your bob-tailed, slit-eared bay around where they would attract the attention of men like Rue and Barry."

"They worried my guns," Crocker said.

"That's it. After the killings, Rue and Barry returned your guns. Barry described your loss to me and Rue gave me the tip to come out here."

"But why did they come a-trailin' out here too?"

Gart laughed. "To make double sure the guilt was pinned on you. They meant to clinch it by fetching along the two purses and planting them on you. So after they got here, you remember, Barry came into the house alone for a drink. He stuck the purses under the sink. Later, they put on that show of tearing the place apart. It was damn good acting—but the best of all was when Rue, not Barry, found the purses. Of course, Barry had a chance to tell his partner where he'd hid them when they followed us down to the barn."

Crocker turned his good eye toward Gart and it had the rain-swept blue, the intense blue, and yet the soft languishing blue of a storm-cleared Arizona sky.

"I shore am grateful to yuh, Sheriff."

Gart walked over and took a small cardboard box away from Crocker. In it were three 12-gauge shotgun shells.

He patted the boy on the head. "Cute, ain't he?" he said to Crocker.

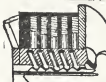
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